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Berkeley, California

Margaret Wentworth Owings

ARTIST, AND WILDLIFE AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENDER

With Introductions by
Wallace Stegner
and
Emily Polk

Interviews Conducted by
Suzanne Riess and Ann Lage
in 1986-1988

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MARGARET WENTWORTH OWINGS, 1978

Head sculpted by Emilio Greco, 1954
Photograph by Jeanne Thwaite

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Introductions by Wallace Stegner, author, and Emily Polk, founder of Small Wilderness Areas Preserved [SWAP].

Interviewed 1986-1988 by Suzanne Riess and Ann Lage. The Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

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INTRODUCTION by Wallace Stegner

Margaret Owings is more than meets the eye, but what meets the eye is not merely attractive but striking. Tall and beautiful, she has a bearing that should make her seem reserved and unapproachable, but that only makes her regal. The head she carries so proudly wears a face for smiling. An artist, she has a flair for the exotic in her clothes and jewelry, and yet no one could call her arty. Her voice is throaty and full of laughter, her interest in others is warm and immediate. People draw close to the warmth and light she radiates. She seems made to charm drawing rooms, and does so without effort or affectation.

Yet under the finished surface is a woman with principles and convictions, a woman acutely sensitive to natural beauty and friendly to wild things, and committed to their rescue and preservation. In her service on the California State Park Commission, in her collaborations with her husband Nat Owings, the noted architect, in the conservation of the Big Sur coast and many historic building in New Mexico, and above all in her dogged efforts to save the sea otter from fishermen and the mountain lion from gunners, she has shown herself to be as intelligent and imaginative as she is stubborn. And she is scared of nobody.

Nat Owings used to say that Margaret would never promise to marry him until he offered to build her a house on a crag above the Big Sur coast. It is small, private, an eagles nest perched between the sea with its passing traffic of seals, sea otters, and orcas, and the Santa Lucia Mountains in whose dusty trails they often saw the flowerlike tracks of mountain lions. Surely it is one of the most spectacular houses anywhere. For many years Margaret and Nat alternated between it and another small perfect house at Jacona, north of Santa Fe. Now that Nat is dead, Margaret clings to her crag above the sea where Nat's ashes were scattered a few years ago as a peregrine falcon, his favorite bird, coasted close as if to see him off.

We did not know Margaret in her early life, but we were privileged to be her good friends from the mid-1960s on. A common interest in environmental issues threw the four of us together. We occupied their guest house at Jacona several times, we lunched or dined in their eagle's nest, which Margaret calls Wild Bird, above the Big Sur

surf, we less frequently lured them up our less-spectacular way. At different times, Nat and I both served on the National Parks Advisory Board, and once we shared a three-week inspection trip to the Everglades, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. We went together with Martin Litton down the Grand Canyon, and only then, when Margaret took pains to store insulin in at least two boats, discovered that she was a diabetic.

She does not talk about her ailments. She talks about her convictions and her goals. But Nat, who adored her, did not let her take too many chances. When we discovered that there were no rental mules available, and that we would have to walk the hot, strenuous trail up from Phantom Ranch to the South Rim, Nat pulled his rank as current chairman of the Park Advisory Board, and we rode up on the superintendent's personal mule. If we had had to walk it, Margaret would have been the least querulous voice among us.

When I was young, we used to judge people by the criterion of whether they were "good sports" or not. Margaret is the ultimate good sport. Once, when I was supposed to make some remarks at an environmental group meeting, and could not get there, I wrote some words, hoping they would be enough. Margaret, nursing two broken ribs, drove all the way from Big Sur to San Francisco to read them for me.

What a wonderful bundle of convictions and contradictions she is. (The contradictions are only apparent, the convictions are bedrock.) She has worked her head off to save the sea otter and the mountain lion, and she has seen some success, and with luck will shortly see more. She makes herself at home in the hurly-burly of controversy and contention. But her personal world she likes to keep in meticulous order. I can think of nothing so characteristic of her as her little jewel of a studio in Jacona. Not a <u>santo</u> or kachina is out of place, every Navajo or Chimayo rug blends perfectly, every pencil and brush lies clean and straight. A photograph of that studio when she finishes work for the morning would look like a carefully arranged still life.

And yet how joyously she meets life and people, how paganly right she looks, combing her long hair on a Colorado River beach, how little she cares for proprieties and appearances! I remember a time when she and Nat were showing us a ruin they had discovered, over across the Rio Grande near Puye. Margaret was leading the way up a steep hill, I was behind her, Nat and my wife behind me. A sudden gust of wind nearly blew me off the hill, and I looked up to see Margaret absolutely enveloped in her long skirts, blown inside-out, all but lifting into the air. When she had got her skirts down and under control she sat down on the ground and laughed till she cried.

Nobody can listen to Margaret Owings' account of her own life without becoming acquainted with one of the most effective wildlife conservationists and one of the great spirits. We count ourselves lucky to have been with her on some of the occasions she records, and to have known both her and Nat, who while remaining supremely themselves made a marvelous team.

Wallace Stegner
Author

May 10, 1990
Los Altos Hills, California

INTRODUCTION by Emily Polk

A news story about Margaret Owings appeared in 1970, recounting her role as a mover and shaker on the State Parks Commission, and especially as a champion of wildlife and its living spaces. A few days before reading the article I had watched a particularly romantic rock and oak-covered hill simply bulldozed off the face of the beautiful San Luis Obispo valley. This was followed by the cutting of ancient live oaks, some estimated at four hundred years but now being cleared for a development.

I had recently returned to live in California after years in England, India, and the East Coast, and the shock of these events triggered a plan for saving such small remnants of pristine California. So the news of this energetic force-for-nature, Margaret Owings, almost a neighbor, living some seventy-five miles up the Big Sur coast, came as a stirring surprise. Her work had brought her to the public eye during our years away.

I felt bold enough to phone her and to send her my plan of action, the outline of an idea. A note came back. She was always glad to hear from people who stand up and begin something. There were names of people to write. I was to keep in touch. The following week, before driving home to Los Osos from San Francisco, I telephoned, and hearing her warm unhurried voice say "come to lunch," turned my wheels towards Big Sur.

Driving that day to meet Margaret, I could not know how central to a decade of work in land preservation would be the quick kindness and perceptive guidance of the woman I would meet. "The gate will be open," she had said. Through a high, solid, rather Asian wooden gate, the stone driveway curved down the cliff edge, a six hundred foot drop at my right fender, ending at a stone path bordered by traceries of delicate shrubs and herbs. As the car settled to a stop, I saw a smiling woman coming up the path. She was tall and graceful--Nat Owings once described her as "moving like a deer"--with dark eyes, and silvering dark hair carried as a high crown.

We walked down the path into a "lighthouse" of a house shafted into a point of bedrock. Gleaming natural redwood, walls of windows filtering the day with slatted wooden blinds. Books, rare things, sea shells,

carvings, some gilded and Asian. Margaret's own exquisite line drawings, sheets of iron, slabs of stone. It was a world kaleidoscope, this house named "Wild Bird."

We lunched on the porch cantilevered into the sea air. Small cypress, brightened by blue jays and squirrels, grew into the near cliff rocks. Almost directly below, in the viridian green of the ocean, floated coppery rafts of giant kelp around which lay sea lions and sea otters. That first day with Margaret was like exploring the lights and shadows of a sea cave. It was plain sandy talk about ways to bring results in nature protection, and complex shining talk about poetry, painting, and books.

My work to save small wilderness areas delighted Margaret. She wrote letters and gave me names. Following up with these, I began to glimpse the range of her influence--often the initial thrust--in practically every phase of nature conservation in California. Simply by being interested, she could boost energies. Her wisdom and sense of purpose challenged the imagination.

Over those years, each visit with Margaret brought out fresh ideas and harmonies as we explored small diversions along the way--a new painting or poem, delicious simple food, the excitement of colors and forms. She could say, if I phoned to tell her about a setback, "Throw a vermillion scarf over your shoulder and just go on!"

Returning home that day in 1970, I pressed on the gas and turned the high corners going south, and I felt the excitement of beginning a new experience. "By such enterprise," Spencer wrote, "many rich regions are discovered." The richest region for me in that enterprise then beginning, was the joy of knowing Margaret Owings.

Emily Polk, Founder of S.W.A.P.
(Small Wilderness Areas Preserved)

May 3, 1990
Salisbury, England

INTERVIEW HISTORY

The National Audubon citation in 1964 honored Margaret Wentworth Owings as "artistic, articulate citizen of the Golden State, a conservationist to whom the word means action." At that time her accomplishments were many: spearheading a lobbying campaign in 1959 in Sacramento to prevent the legalized killing of 75 per cent of California's sea lions; successfully campaigning in 1963 to remove the state bounty from the mountain lion; a bold attack as State Park Commissioner on the state highway department's plan to route a highway through the old-growth redwoods in California state parks.

But her most impressive accomplishments lay ahead of her: in 1968 she began a crusade to preserve and protect the California sea otter. Her effort in the ensuing twenty years has drawn on her intense commitment to the otter, personal ties to influential scientists and environmentalists, and skills in influencing public policy. She founded the citizen group Friends of the Sea Otter, hired a research staff, aroused the public by encouraging films, books, and articles on the appealing otter, and developed a highly skilled lobbying effort in Sacramento which relied on expert witnesses as well as emotional appeals. At the same time, she has continued to inspire efforts to save the mountain lion, founding and serving as president of the Mountain Lion Preservation Foundation, and keeping pressure on Sacramento legislators to continue a moratorium on shooting of the lion. These efforts culminated with the passage of a statewide initiative in 1989 to ban trophy hunting of the mountain lion and preserve its disappearing habitat.

This distinguished record placed Margaret Owings high on the list of California environmentalists whom the Regional Oral History Office wished to interview. Her oral history emerged, however, from another direction--when our office phoned Mrs. Owings in 1983 to relay an inquiry about whether an oral history had ever been conducted with her husband, architect Nathaniel Owings. In the course of the conversation she mentioned having almost decided on The Bancroft Library as a repository for her papers. She wanted some reassurance that the library would not define her life in a limited way, and would be interested in her papers reflecting her artistic involvements and her connection with the Southwest, as well as her conservation and wildlife preservation work in California. The Bancroft Library, of course, gave her that assurance.

Defining Margaret Owing's life "in a limited way" would be hard to do. The papers she eventually sent covered Africa, adobes, sea lions, Santa Fe, manuscripts, poetry, pictures, redwoods, a record of her years on the State Park Commission, her box of "letters from numerous well-known people." And we knew that we had clues to only a part of her life in those grey boxes.

We proposed an oral history memoir in a letter to Mrs. Owings in September 1985. We spoke of documenting Wentworth family history, education at Mills and at Radcliffe, work as an artist, marriage to Nathaniel Owings and houses and joint projects in Santa Fe and Big Sur, and a lifetime of awareness and dedication to wildlife preservation and conservation. The oral history was envisioned not as a complete record of her prodigiously productive life, but as a supplement to her papers and her published writings. Two interviewers were assigned to her oral history, Suzanne Riess, with her background in art and architecture, and Ann Lage, in environmental history.

From the beginning, Mrs. Owings expressed a certain hesitancy about the oral history process:

> The more I think about [the day you return], the more hesitant I am about a filling a book with vignettes or long and drawn-out accounts. I think...it will be more like a Jung-thing, in which I cross my legs up on the table or do something undignified--so that the thoughts will just flow rather than get tied up in knots...We'll see. Margaret.

Indeed, Margaret Owings is not undignified, and the feet never were up on the table, but the oral history has from the start been caught between the desire to be spontaneous, and Margaret's respect for the power and poetry of words, carefully and precisely expressed.

Margaret Owings was born in 1913 to parents who were very sensitive to the talents of their daughter. Her health was affected by undiagnosed diabetes, but her childhood was a vigorous mix of being drawn to artistic endeavors and being moved and affected by her environment. Her father, Frank W. Wentworth, was treasurer of Save-the-Redwoods League, and a trustee of Mills College, both important influences. Her parents came originally from the East Coast, and she would return there for graduate education in museum studies.

Margaret Wentworth's first marriage was to an easterner, Malcolm Millard, from Lake Forest, Illinois. Margaret settled there, and her daughter Wendy was born there, but she was sufficiently dissatisfied with her life at that time and place that she turned to John Muir's writings

like one turning to a Bible at a time of need. She concentrated herself by evoking the Sierra she knew, and drawing.

After World War II, the Millards came to live in California, on the Monterey Peninsula--Malcolm Millard's father had years earlier built a cabin in nearby Big Sur. For Margaret it was a life-saving direction to go. Here, close to the sea and to the Sierra, her energies were channeled back into her artistic endeavors and the environment. Living in Carmel Highlands, she began the first of her projects--self-labeled "saving things."

This oral history tells the story of a woman championing sea otters, sea lions, mountain lions, redwoods, and wild places. And far from these being abstract passions, she has seen closely and experienced personally everything that concerns her. And her first response to her concerns has been to ask, "What can we do about this?" She has worked in the public arena--through newspapers, the legislative process, environmental organizations--as well as behind the scenes, through her personal influence and considerable charm.

Her other response has been to write, certainly the practical letters and speeches enlisting support and articulating her cause, but even more important, the poetic responses that help her discharge her own feelings and communicate those feelings. A group of poems is in the collection of Owings papers in The Bancroft Library. And for the Friends of the Sea Otter's publication, Otter Raft, she has written "Cliffside Seat," thoughtful, atmospheric pieces, written, as she said in a phone conversation, "in a poetic vein, not fact, fact, fact like a machine gun." In the oral history she discusses the influences on her nature writings, and the writers she admires, and she refers to her two chapbooks of selections from writers, and from friends' letters, and from her own thoughts.

As the interviews went on, attempting to move chronologically through Margaret's life, but allowing for the many tangential directions of thought, she began to express a writer's frustration with the process of oral history, and a perfectionist's frustration with getting the right words to best express her thought:

> I suppose, in a sense, I should spend these last years of my life in some wild place with the grasses and leaves blowing around me, and keeping silent rather than "recording" the many memories that often crowd into my mind . . .

Nevertheless, she perservered, and over a two and one-half year period from June 1986 to November 1988, Margaret Owings recorded six interview sessions with Suzanne Riess and three with Ann Lage, a total of nearly twenty hours. We met with Margaret in her spectacular, yet comfortable, home on Grimes Point overlooking the sea lions and sea otters she has

worked to protect, surrounded by art of her creation or stamped with her distinctive taste. Despite uneven health during these years, Margaret applied herself to the task of creating the oral history with her characteristic energy. She went over her scrapbooks on the lion and the otter, prepared notes for the interview sessions, thought through the important influences of her many accomplished friends.

Again, during the editing of the transcribed tapes, Margaret worked assiduously, giving us an inkling of the prodigious capabilities that led to so many successes for otters and lions. Turning a writer's eye to the transcript of the spoken work, Margaret reordered and reworked many passages, with the help of long-time friend and Friends of the Sea Otter colleague Bobbie Harms. Along the way she sent us written pieces on Wallace Stegner, Sigurd Olson, and others, again pleading that she thought better and could more carefully craft her remarks in front of the typewriter. These sections have been inserted where appropriate and are marked as written additions. At our urging, she was careful to retain the flavor of her conversations, and refrain from revising her remarks substantively. The original tapes of the interview sessions are on deposit in The Bancroft Library.

Also inserted in the oral history, in addition to a selection of photographs, are examples of her art work, speech-writing, "Cliffside Seats" and many other of Margaret's creations. We feel that the oral history, now nearly five years in the making, does justice to this remarkable woman and weaves a whole from the many threads of a most productive life. Special thanks goes to Dr. George Lindsay, retired director of the California Academy of Sciences, who helped us raise funds to produce the oral history, to the friends and admirers of Margaret Owings who contributed, and to the Laird, Norton Foundation.

Suzanne Riess
Ann Lage
Interviewer/Editors

December 1990
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University of California
Berkeley, California

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Berkeley, California 94720

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

(Please write clearly. Use black ink.)

Your full name MARGARET WENTWORTH OWINGS

Date of birth APRIL 29, 1913 Birthplace BERKELEY, CA

Father's full name FRANK WESLEY WENTWORTH

Occupation OFFICE FURNITURE - MILLS COLLEGE (TREASURER, CONTROLLER, Σ - TRUSTEE) Birthplace CHELSEA MASSACH

Mother's full name JEAN POND WENTWORTH

Occupation SMITH COLLEGE, 1903, housewife Birthplace BRIGHTON, MASSACHU

Your spouse NATHANIEL ALEXANDER OWINGS, ARCHITECT

Your children MY DAUGHTER, WENDY MILLARD BENJAMIN,
MY SECOND HUSBAND'S CHILDREN: EMILY OWINGS KAPOSI, NATALIE OWINGS PRAEL, JENNIFER OWINGS DEWEY, NATHANIEL OTIS OWIN

Where did you grow up? BERKELEY

Present community BIG SUR

Education ANNA HEAD SCHOOL, BERKELEY — BRADFORD ACAEM
MASS, MILLS COLLEGE GRADUATE, 1934, RADCLIFFE College - 19
SAN FRANCISCO MUSEUM of ART POST-GRADUATE - MUSEUM STUDI

Occupation(s)
6 ONE-MAN SHOWS - PAINTING -; 3 ONE-MAN SHOWS, COLLAGES IN STITCHERY

Areas of expertise ART + CONSERVATION WORK -
CALIF. STATE PARKS COMMISSION (69-69) NAT. PARKS FOUNDATION (68-69)
DIRECTOR, AFRICAN WILDLIFE LEADERSHIP FOUND (1968-80) - DEFENDERS OF WILDLIFE, DIRECTOR - (69-74), ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENSE FUND (72-83)

Other interests or activities
REGIONAL TRUSTEE, MILLS COLLEGE (62-68)

GOLD MEDAL CONSERV. SVC AWARD DEPT. INTERIOR (1975)
CONSERV. AWARD; CALIF ACAD. SCIENCE AWARD (1979)
AM. MOTORS, CONSERV. AWARD (1980); JOSEPH WOOD KRUTCH MEDAL - U.S. HUMANE SOC
NATIONAL AUDUBON MEDAL - 1983; A. STARKER LEOPOLD AWARD, NATURE CONSER

Organizations in which you are active

FOUNDER & PRESIDENT, FRIENDS of The SEA OTTER (1968 - 90)
MOUNTAIN LION PRESERVATION FOUNDATION - CHAIR - 1987-90)

I FAMILY HISTORY AND EARLY CHILDHOOD

Wentworth and Pond Families

Riess: Where is the Wentworth family from?

Owings: The Wentworths were from Massachusetts and New Hampshire. Apparently, when they first came over to America in 1636, they were Royalists. This surprises me. They felt threatened in Boston and moved to New Hampshire. They disapproved of the Boston Tea Party and saved the people of New Hampshire from having a similar "tea party." It was Elder Wentworth who sent the ship away rather than dumping the tea in the bay. They were a strong family and apparently held prestigious leadership positions in England, but their descendants have sort of worn down to our own simple selves. [laughter]

Asking about the Wentworth family is like taking an old monument of a tree and counting its rings and asking how far its roots stretched and how it withstood storms. Its top branches with fresh bundles of needles are where we come in.

My father's family came from the line of Elder William Wentworth, who is considered the founder of our family. He was born in England in 1615 and came to Boston when he was twenty-one years old, ending his life eventually in New Hampshire. His oldest son became the royal governor of New Hampshire, and he was followed as governors by others from the family.

My brother, William Wentworth--Bill--received a letter a few years ago from another Wentworth in the East asking Bill to join a family project to mark a grave for the "Elder William Wentworth."

He was not buried in the churchyard because the people were angry with him for his Royalist leanings. I can only assume that the family took a turn and became good Americans after the Revolution.

Actually, as a child I was more interested in my mother's family, because my grandmother Pond was alive and talked about the details and old memories of the Ponds and the Sandersons. The Sanderson family sailed to America from Aberdeen, Scotland, in 1639. In the early 1700s one of them married a woman named Mercy Gale, which sounds like a "torch singer" at the microphone. I believe these were simple people, farmers and rural living families. When I was at Radcliffe one of the Sandersons took me to see an old, empty, ramshackle house overgrown with brush where John Burroughs had lived and written at one time. Apparently Sandersons lived near at hand and they were friends, which pleased me.

My grandmother was the youngest of a Sanderson family of thirteen children. They lived on a farm in Brighton, Massachusetts, a big white colonial house with a porch surrounded by large elms and big barns. My great-grandfather used to drive his cows through the Boston Common. I have a beautiful memento of that, from the close of his life when he was given a dinner by friends at which he was presented with a specially-designed Sheffield butter dish. On the cover of it was resting a cow with horns turned in. It is in my possession today, and I love to think of this cow walking across the Boston Common.

Riess: Tell me about your mother's father's family.

Owings: My little grandmother, Cordelia Clark Sanderson, brought up on the farm, was to meet my grandfather, William Baird Pond, at the gate to the farmhouse when she was seventeen. He was trying to make a living selling pony carts. There he was, with a red cart and a little pony, a handsome young man! And it wasn't long before they married.

My grandfather apparently was a maverick, the son of the Reverend J. Evarts Pond whose father before him, Dr. Enoch Pond, was the first president of the Bangor Theological Seminary. Although Bangor, Maine, is part of the family roots, and their gravestones have gathered much moss, I had not visited Maine until some years ago when I went to Seal Harbor with David and Peggy Rockefeller and we took a picnic out to Bartlet Island which Peggy had recently purchased to run cattle.

We were lying back in the grass, drinking wine and laughing with a bunch of old friends who often summered there, when a fire started in the woods across the island. Peggy took total charge

and drove all of us through the thick brush with axes and wet sacks. I found myself with Dr. Nathan Pusey, president of Harvard, and his wife hacking away and talking through the noise. I asked them how I was going to get over to Bangor, because my mother had asked me to put flowers on the graves of the family members at the Bangor Seminary. They both knew the seminary and said in unison, "Why, you belong here in Maine more than any of the rest of us!"

Though my grandfather was expected to follow in the footsteps of his family's educational church and missionary work, he instead ran away from home and worked on a cattle ship to France. The story goes that he had to twist the tails of the cows to keep them from lying down. He bought a bicycle and finally returned home, bringing with him two large etched prints, one, "Aspect General de Versailles" and the other "Aspect General de Paris," both of which I have. This is quite a commentary, that a young man would select these prints as the record of his trip. He also bought a gold pen point, since his father claimed that penmanship was his only asset. I am sending these prints to Cornell this year and still have his gold pen point among my possessions.

After my grandparents' marriage, at the farm, my grandfather moved a step up from selling pony carts and took my grandmother to New York where he entered the business of selling elaborate city carriages. And so it was that my grandmother, a quiet little farm girl, was driving beside her husband in an elegant carriage behind horses. Grandfather rented the ground floor of the Flatiron Building on Madison Square in which to show off his carriages. And I'm reminded that it was at that spot on V.E. Day in May 1945 that I spent a wild evening with Russian sailors, just off their boat, feasting on borsch, caviar and vodka.

The Studebaker family met my grandfather, apparently liked him and bought out his carriage business--and then disregarded the carriages and started instead to make Studebaker cars. They took my grandparents to South Bend, Indiana, and placed my grandfather in charge of their first factory.

My mother, in the meantime, born in 1883, was placed with her grandmother Sanderson back on the Brighton farm, where she remembered throughout her life a little pink pig that was given to her as her own pet. It finally had to go to market, her childhood tragedy! She also told me many things about her fox terrier named "Daudet," after Alphonse Daudet who wrote Lettres de mon Moulin, her favorite book.

Mother was very bright in school. She won debates and spelling matches and was written up in the newspaper for her

honors. Later she went to Smith College where she enjoyed acting in plays and studying Latin and Greek. She graduated in 1903 and met my father who had graduated from Dartmouth College. They met in Gloucester and afterwards became engaged.

Mother then went to the University of Chicago to be closer to her parents and to get a masters degree in history of art. She tutored in Latin and Greek. That was quite a period for them to be apart, and Mother saved all of Dad's letters. Dad, in the meantime, had gone to California where he started an office furniture business which he called "Library Bureau." They were married in South Bend, Indiana, and Dad took Mother to Loveland, Colorado, for their honeymoon. Dad thought the name appropriate. Mother had never been in the mountains before.

In coming to California to live, I think both of them wanted a new life. The old family things were not important to them.

Riess: Were they cutting ties in a way that was an act of rebellion?

Owings: I don't think I would use that word because neither of my parents was rebellious. However, my father had a very strict mother. He and his two brothers and two deaf sisters lived in Chelsea, Massachusetts. I was taken to see the house when I was at Radcliffe. By then, it stood in a crowded part of town and had become a boarding house for some thirty or forty people. Its remnants were distinguished and Victorian, but it was shoddy.

My grandmother Wentworth, after whom I am named, was very sedate and exacting in her regulations, so much so that one of her sons, who went into medicine at Harvard and graduated at the head of his class and was offered a fine position in New York, chose to break away. He went to Idaho and married a Seventh Day Adventist girl who was very pretty and their daughters were equally pretty and well trained in the Adventist faith. They lived in a little town called Stites, which I was told had only one street.

Uncle Harry took care of the town. And the Indians whom he cared for often repaid him with some of their beaded costumes, their rugs, and at least once, a cougar skin with a bullet hole in it. I laid that skin on my floor in Mills Hall my freshman year in college. I felt badly about the bullet hole. It was evidence of the cougars being hunted, and that distressed me.

Another son, Uncle Roy, lived in Winchester, Massachusetts, and had three children. He became a banker. My father chose to come out here to California, and my brother and I were born in Berkeley, at the Alta Bates Hospital.

When we were still quite young--I might have been three and my brother five--Mother took us on the train to South Bend, Indiana. It was a hard trip for us children and it must have been ungodly for Mother. I screamed the total trip and my brother came down with measles after he arrived. Still it had one very pleasant memory which I carry clearly to this day.

My grandmother had a beautiful electric car, just like a jewel box. It was all upholstered in gray, and had a cut-glass vase with a rose in it, attached above my seat. I was lifted up into it and Grandma drove me slowly around a park, and it was heaven! It was the only car my grandmother ever drove.

Grandma Pond came out to Berkeley, stopping at the Grand Canyon en route. It made a lasting impression on her, and she bought an Indian basket which she filled with stones she had gathered. She purchased a house in Berkeley, and my Grandfather joined her but became very ill, some disease they were not able to diagnose. It was from the Pond family that I inherited my diabetes, though I have no knowledge that that was the cause of his early death.

Riess: Did your father enjoy the furniture business?

Owings: "Library Bureau" is what he called it. He apparently enjoyed it. As a child I remember only the office picnics where I played with all the office employees' children. They had sack races and bobbing for apples and prizes. I once was given a prize of a silver dollar and I bought a hoop with it.

Dad must have felt comfortably off before the Depression, for he took all of us to Europe, including my grandmother, for close to a year's time. He sold his business to Remington-Rand. The 1929 Depression brought us instantly home. In fact, we were spread out in a Louis Quinze suite at the Regina Hotel in Paris when my father suddenly moved us into the cheapest rooms in the hotel. I found myself on the top floor in a small, undecorated room with a dormer window, and imagined I was Sara Crew [in A Little Princess, a children's book by Frances Hodgson Burnett]. When we returned home everything was simpler and a little different.

Riess: Was your father in World War I?

Owings: No, but both my parents worked steadily with the Red Cross. My mother started the first Red Cross shop on Center Street in Berkeley. During the flu epidemic my father worked to empty the classrooms at the University of California and bring in cots to

care for the hundreds of patients. Many people died. Finally, both my parents came down with the flu.

Riess: Do you remember that time?

Owings: Yes, I do. Everyone wore masks. I went to live with my grandmother. My grandmother had a wonderful four-poster bed that was brought up the Mississippi by Captain William Baird in 1830 from Mexico to give to his daughter who was marrying into the Pond family in Bangor, Maine. The bed had a top and was so high that it originally had two steps to climb into it. It finally passed down to my grandmother, and later, my mother. I was allowed to sleep in it during that troubled period.

Riess: Was your mother a career woman in any way, would you say?

Owings: When I was a child, she worked to start the day nursery in Albany. You know, during those years it was less common for the mother of children to be a career woman. Actually, during my younger years she cared for me at home because I was not at all well. Her friends were our neighbors, and the Town and Gown Club her activities.

Illness

Riess: Did you attend only private schools in Berkeley?

Owings: No, no! I went to the Thousand Oaks School when two buildings had been moved into the fields below our house. I wasn't allowed to attend the first year because I was too young. But the second year I entered the first grade with a wonderful teacher. I loved it because I could do art work, but I could only attend half a day because I was so weak and dehydrated and I couldn't handle food.

What it was, was the beginning of my diabetes, but neither of our doctors knew how to define it or what to do about it. Of course, there was no insulin nor any intravenous feeding, so I was drying up. It was not any fun at all. It was just a remarkable thing that I lived through it, and not until 1952 did it hit me in full force.

It was mid-winter, following my divorce from Malcolm Millard, and I had had a severe case of flu. I was living in a small, adobe house in Nambe, New Mexico. I had my daughter, Wendy, with me, and I was seeking a tutor for her, a woman who already had two girl students her age.

I was driving down a narrow snow-thick road, then after two miles turning abruptly left to cross through a rocky river caked with snow and ice, up a steep road to the tutor's house. I didn't know what was wrong with me other than that I was dying of thirst and had such pain in my cramped legs that I could hardly move them, and I was losing my sight to the point of being unable to see where the road led.

So, I left Wendy and drove some eighteen miles into Santa Fe, found Dr. Hausner, whom I did not know, and recited to him a list of incongruous ailments, expecting him to tell me I was crazy. Instead, I was reciting the exact list of diabetic symptoms! He told me I had diabetes, and then, when tears came to my eyes, he laid his hand on mine and said, "You're not alone." He sent me to the hospital where I commenced insulin shots which I have continued for thirty-eight years.

Dr. Hausner was an excellent teacher. I learned to weigh my food and test my urine and later my blood, watch over my feet, and of course, my diet! I was quite involved with diabetes, and I wrote for the Diabetic Forecast, and they put my picture on the cover. I wrote a thing with humor. There were so many times that I'd go into shock and such ridiculous things would happen, you know, because I went out of my mind and I'd do something incredible, but I could laugh about it after it was over. Of course it was a dangerous thing; it wasn't good at all.

Growing Up, Yosemite Road, Berkeley

Owings: I said earlier that I felt fortunate that my parents had come to California. The second thing that I was fortunate about was that when I was two years old they went to visit a house on Yosemite Road, and they took Billy and me. It was a house that was nestled among these enormous rocks and marvelous live oaks, you know, with their elbows down on the ground, and resting on the rocks. It had been designed by a student of Maybeck [Mark Daniels] and therefore it had that quality to it. A Japanese gardener had done the garden.

It just had everything a child could dream about. At that time I only knew a few words because all I said, holding my mother's hand, was "Buy it, buy it." [laughter] She said, "Shh, quiet." Anyway, they bought it. It was a delightful place to grow up, just a delightful place.

My brother and I grew up among trees and, as a small child, it was intimate beauty, because it was everywhere around us. Below us we had a big grove of eucalyptus trees. I would look out at them and think of them as a family, mother and father and son and daughter. And I used to lie on my bed and listen to what my father called the olive-sided flycatcher. It would seem to be always at the top of the largest eucalyptus. We'd all imitate its call. Roger Tory Peterson put into words what the olive-sided flycatcher says: "Whip three cheers!" But my father used to say it was calling, "Look who's here!"

Riess: That wasn't the only house in the neighborhood then, was it?

Owings: No, there were four houses on our side of Yosemite Road. Next to us was where Peter B. Kyne lived. He was a writer and reporter at the time of World War I. He was on a dock when they were unloading big drums from a battleship. Out of one of the drums crept a young French boy. He had climbed onto the ship at Cherbourg and hidden in that drum. His name was Francois. Here was this poor boy, without family, without anything, just a wreck, and he had at least the spunk to climb into that drum and put the top on it.

They were going to send him back, so Peter B. Kyne brought him home, and we had all kinds of adventures with Francois. Francois looked at things differently than we did, but at any rate we learned from him! We had already dug trenches and the boys made mud-ball bullets in the field we owned across the road. We girls wore white nursing kerchiefs with a red cross over our foreheads. Everyone wanted Francois on their side!

Riess: The Thousand Oaks area had a wild feeling then?

Owings: Oh yes. We all owned the fields across the road, including a tennis court and a swimming pool. These fields, when we weren't at war in the trenches, were filled with johnny jump-ups and little bunches of baby blue eyes and brodiaeas. These were my children. Neighborhood children would come around and pick them and I'd shout, "Oh no! Oh no! Don't pick them. Leave them here."

I remember one morning at breakfast we heard a saw. It sounded like a very important saw! Yosemite Road goes down a hill from our house, then turns a sharp corner onto The Alameda, and the sound was way down there. My father got up from the breakfast table and hurried out to the sidewalk, then hurried down the road as the sound increased. He found men cutting the big eucalyptus! He was so angry that he immediately committed a miracle. He

stopped the men and purchased the property from our walled garden down to The Alameda.

He decided to have a stone wall built to embrace the whole block, and engaged a big rough man to undertake it. This man, speaking with my father down by our front door, suggested that he could "blast with dynamite" the huge moss-covered imbedded rocks around our house! You can imagine! Well, the man went away crossly, but he did agree to build the wall without exploding the natural beauty of our garden.

The low stone wall proceeded at a surprisingly good rate until my father received a phone call from a woman who lived some blocks away. She informed my father that her wall was being depleted of stones to supply the stones for our wall. Needless to say, my father made this rough giant of a man take down our wall and truck the stones back and rebuild this woman's wall. The result became a shorter wall than the first dream, but about two hundred feet were constructed and we were relieved to have the stone-man disappear from our lives.

Riess: Growing up in that Thousand Oaks neighborhood you saw development, and you saw the oaks cut down?

Owings: Oh, we saw so much change. Zoning was hardly recognized. I remember when I was in the second and third grade walking down to Thousand Oaks School. We went through the eucalyptus grove below our house, and then we walked into an oak canyon and a two-board bridge with one railing. Up the other side were fields filled with meadow larks in the spring or early summer. A man ploughed those fields with a horse and hand-held plough. One day I pointed out a lark's nest in the grass, and he ploughed all around it, leaving grass growing to protect it. One of my first small victories! [laughter]

But later there was a period when from our house we heard nothing but the hammering of nails because they were building all those houses at once along straight streets. We saw that happen.

Riess: Is your brother older or younger than you?

Owings: He's two years older.

Riess: A nice age difference for an older brother.

Owings: Two years difference were enormous. Billy played with older children, and I played with David Smith, who was almost exactly my age.

Riess: Did you have housekeepers looking after you?

Owings: Not much "looking after," but we always had a cook and a Polish laundress. And I remember Rita, a Swedish woman who kept an eye out for me. When I came home with a broken collarbone, she was there to help me.

Riess: How did you do that?

Owings: Oh, playing tag at another house, and I fell. My brother was very kind to me. I felt quite sick and was in severe pain, so he offered to let me ride his tricycle, which normally I longed to ride but was not allowed to. He was being very kind to me. I got on the tricycle and then couldn't move, so I slunk home to Rita and threw up.

[written addition from Margaret Owings:]

In our neighborhood in North Berkeley, where the hill begins to rise steeply among the oaks and rocks, is the "Indian Trail," a rough stony trail overshadowed by oaks and edged by the stone walls of the four houses that border it. It climbs up from The Alameda to Yosemite Road and used to have big urns at each end to mark it as something important. When I was a child, children from the Brock's house, the Matthews's house, the Smith's house, and Eleanor from the Leavens' house all spent a lot of time on the trail.

My brother Bill and I lived two houses away on Yosemite Road but headed for life along the trail as soon as we left home. Morton Matthew and David Smith collected spiders and put them on wild raspberry bushes beside the trail--beautiful spider webs and yellow and black spiders that one could get enmeshed among. And then there were wires stretching from tree to tree with earphones at each end, and the kids could talk to one another from one tree-house to another on either side of the trail. My brother used to hammer a lot in the tall tree house which had an outside ladder to reach the upstairs. One time Bill dropped his hammer on top of Barbara Brock's head, and there was a lot of noise.

We had already dug to China in the middle of the trail (and I believed them when the older children pointed out the blue sky at the bottom of the hole). But when we were all attending school, the newly-built Thousand Oaks School, we were wiser than that, and we wanted to make money. And so it was, we decided on an "Indian Trail Bazaar" to raise money for the school. All of us worked on it. We hung Japanese lanterns in the oaks and made signs to put up in school. Barbara and Martha Brock in their red sweaters--they always wore red sweaters--sold white mice that their older

sister, Lois, in medical school, contributed. Helen Marian Matthew, dressed as a gypsy, told fortunes. I wore my Spanish costume made by my grandmother, and sat in the cave which is halfway up the trail. I had a big "grab bag" filled with new toys that I hadn't become attached to yet. I sold all my "grabs" for 10 cents each.

Cookies were made on the Smith's big iron stove, and they all had black burned bottoms. David sold cones with ice cream churned by Mi, the kind old Chinese man who wore a black Chinese cap. Eleanor sold popcorn in paper bags, and there were other edibles that I've forgotten. But altogether we made $23, and we were stunned by the amount. It had to be counted many times before we took the bag of money to school and gave it to the principal and told him that we wanted him to buy the school a bird bath.

The principal was kind and thanked us but told us there were other things more necessary for the school. Necessary? Why, the birds needed water! He could use it, he said, to buy new gravel for the play yard. We were pretty somber about this and clung to our disappointment.

I phoned Eleanor and David Smith a year ago to renew our reaction to this incident. David said "somber" was not the word, it was much worse! Eleanor tried to quiet him down, and his seventy-five years tempered him a little when he said, "It was unfair." (An understatement!) He was <u>still</u> mad about it! All three of us agreed that we would remember it the rest of our lives. (The next day David, who had not been well, went over to the Pacific-Union Club for lunch and a game of dominos with a friend. Returning on the California Street cable car, he suffered a stroke which ended his life.)

[end of addition]

<u>Williams School and Art Lessons</u>

Riess: When did you enter the Williams School?

Owings: First I went to the Thousand Oaks School. When I went there we had just three portable school buildings. My brother was in the middle one and I was in the first one. Then I was taken out and put in the Williams School because I wasn't well. I was sick most of the third grade.

I think I went to Williams when I was in the fourth grade. I always loved walking up those broad red carpeted stairs and seeing Miss [Cora] Williams in her white shoes and long white dress and her white hair piled on her head. There was a fountain at the base of the stairway. It was like a castle. We had classes in different bedrooms.

My friend Eleanor Leavens was my closest friend from the time her parents built a house on Yosemite Road. Her father was a Unitarian minister. Eleanor wasn't sent to the Williams school, but the two of us had Greek dancing lessons taught by a Greek man outside on the terrace by the balustrades. We wore togas, and he taught us a song that we sang in Greek as we danced! (I tried singing that Greek song when I was sailing through the Greek isles in 1961 with Nat and my daughter Wendy. But no one responded.)

Art was featured at Williams and I was especially looking forward to it because they said, "We're working in oils." That was going to be exciting! But they had one canvas up, and all the children were to work on the same canvas! I was simply horrified! I've always been a solitaire, really. I want to do my own thing. I got the paint on my brush and I looked at it and watched what other children were doing, and I put the brush down and ran home. I simply couldn't do it!

Riess: That's an extraordinary idea.

Owings: It was and it still is!

Riess: Some cooperative spirit that they were trying to instill in all of you.

Owings: Yes, but I didn't fit.

Riess: Do you remember your teachers?

Owings: I remember in particular Mrs. May, the wife of Professor May who taught at the University. She was a beautiful Englishwoman with a beautiful voice and beautiful accent. I was quite in reverence of her. After a while they were divorced, and different things happened, and it was sad. At any rate, for a brief period she left quite an impression on me.

Riess: What was the need for Williams School? Was it thought that public schools weren't good in Berkeley?

Owings: No, no, I only know the reason I went there was because it was a quieter school and I was not well. I could walk to school and I went only half time. It was a gentle school.

But I loved the Thousand Oaks School and remember my first year when I modeled out of plasticine the three bears drawing a covered wagon. My satisfaction is clear in my mind today. [laughing] I also began to draw flowers and birds and little houses.

Riess: Did you take ballet and music classes also as a child?

Owings: Oh, my brother and I studied the piano. Bill went farther than I, but we certainly did a lot of practicing. I went to a dancing class for girls, and in my mind I felt I would like to have done ballet dancing. I met Martha Graham later on and she said, "You are a dancer, aren't you?" That pleased me for a moment. I mean, I took it as a compliment. If I had many lives, that might be one of them, except one has to be so narrowed down and specialized in that training--I'm glad I had a broader span of life.

Frank W. Wentworth and the Save-the-Redwoods League

Riess: Were your parents political people?

Owings: Actually, my father played quite a political role in his life in Berkeley. He was on the Berkeley City Council, which I dare say was quite different from the city council today in Berkeley. For a period he was mayor. His special dream was to establish a park in the center of Berkeley, in fields that were almost vacant between the Berkeley High School and a block or two west of Shattuck Avenue. He wanted to plant trees and have paths and benches which people could enjoy. He was disappointed and really hurt when the whole idea was abandoned.

Riess: How about regional parks? Was he involved in preserving the parks behind Berkeley? Tilden Park and so on?

Owings: Yes, the regional parks were very much my father's interest. "The Canyon" was always a treat for the whole family to walk through, and my father was filled with ideas about making it a park. But his full active interest began when he became close friends with Aubrey and Newton Drury.

Riess: Who were his closest friends?

Owings: Well, I've mentioned a few before. Seldon Smith from Dartmouth lived two doors from us and, of course, Dr. Leavens and Allen Matthew, whom my father always referred to as "the Judge." Other

friends whom my father met at the Bohemian Club or some connection at Mills College were Duncan McDuffie, Edward Hohfeld, and Charles Kendrick.

My father set about to interest Hohfeld and Kendrick in forming with him the Friendship Grove at Prairie Creek State Park. It is a magnificent grove of huge redwoods, deep in the forest, with ferns and a rich distribution of the natural growth, dogwood and mosses. This grove was dedicated in 1956, a year after my father's death.

Riess: Was your father one of the founders of Save-the-Redwoods League?

Owings: My father's connection with Save-the-Redwoods League after the Drurys had introduced it as a "league," included him as one of the first trustees. Aubrey Drury was secretary of the Save-the-Redwoods League. Newton Drury went to Washington, D.C., during the war years to serve as director of national parks. Then he returned to California to be head of state parks. I grew to know Newton when I served on the State Park Commission and concentrated on the redwood issues.

Because of my parents' interest in the redwoods, my brother and his wife and my husband Nat and I formed a grove in my parents' name on the Eel River. It has some very handsome trees, and a bench with a plaque on it with their names, a pleasant place to sit and look out over the river.

Later, the last years of Nat's life, we hiked along Gold Beach and up into Prairie Creek's Fern Canyon--where we met some elk. Further up we selected our own clump of redwoods that gave us both a sense of satisfaction. My brother Bill is now the treasurer of the Save-the-Redwoods League. I'm sorry that my father did not live long enough to see that both of us carried on with the seed planted by him when we were children.

Early Memories and Impressions

Riess: Do you have early family photos of yourself as a child?

Owings: Yes, posed in my best dress, with my brother in a little tailored suit with shorts. Very proper. But I have a few others such as a snapshot of myself sweeping the front steps of the house on Ellsworth Street in Berkeley where I was raised as a baby. I was given this broom, and clearly I was working hard. I was two. I like to laugh over it.

That makes me remember a funny story from that time. It really wasn't funny at all, it was terrifying. My mother had lunch ready and asked me to go out and call Billy, my brother. She thought he was right outside the front door. So I went out the door and down the steps and then proceeded to walk along the sidewalk where I thought Billy was playing. (I'd never done this before all alone.)

Suddenly, I stopped because I was aware of something above me, and I looked up into a horse's face. (There were horses pulling wagons at that time in Berkeley, and the horses were "parked" with their reins tied to an iron pole on which was an iron horse's head and a ring.) Actually, I looked into his mouth and I was petrified! I didn't dare move, could only look up at his mouth and teeth. Fortunately, my mother looked out the door and ran to rescue me.

That fear lasted a long time, and I had to face the challenge of it. Mother took me out and bought riding clothes with a red vest, then took me to Miss Graham who gave riding lessons. Later, when I went to Mills, I joined the Bit and Spur Club, and we rode with English saddle along trails in the hills--now covered with houses. We learned dressage where everything was precise. We rode in horse shows.

My father dedicated the first opening of the ring at Mills on a rainy night with a band playing. I remember him wearing a dress suit and the rain beating down on his starched dress shirt. I could hear it through the loudspeaker. After that, they called the riding ring the Umbrella.

Out at the ranch in New Mexico I had my own horse which I named Romany Rye after the gypsy book written by George Borrow. But it took me a long time to recover from my first horse's mouth.

Unitarian Sunday School

Riess: How alike were you and your brother?

Owings: My brother and I had different temperaments in a way. Bill was very deliberate and careful, and in some ways slower, though I don't mean that he couldn't run fast and hike fast, and he played a very good game of tennis for years, which was something that he shared with his wife, Harriet.

I remember when we were fairly young Berkeley had a snow storm. Naturally, we were hysterical over it. Billy went down into the basement and began to build a sled. He spent the entire time the snow was falling hammering in the basement. When he came out he was carrying a very heavy sled made with two-by-fours, and it wouldn't budge on Yosemite hill, and the snow was melting fast. I laughed a lot, but I remember feeling very sorry for him. He had worked so hard!

As children, my brother and I attended the Unitarian Sunday School in Berkeley.

Riess: Every Sunday?

Owings: There was a period when I was a child that I had perfect attendance. I was given the perfect attendance book at the end of the year, and God knows how I did it, but I was determined. Instead of just giving me a prayer book, or something like that, they asked me what I wanted. I told them The Life of Helen Keller, so that was what they presented me with. I was very much interested in Helen Keller. She had come to Berkeley and Mother had taken me down to meet her and listen to her. I shook her hand. She had a very strange voice, you know. Miss Sullivan was beside her.

The second perfect attendance book I asked for was The Twelve Dancing Princesses, illustrated by Kay Nielsen. I simply loved the illustrations, and I was growing more and more interested in illustrating things myself. I was very proud of it.

Dr. Leavens was the minister. He was the father of Eleanor Leavens. Dr. Leavens would drive all of us little Unitarians down to the church for Sunday school in his canvas-topped Franklin car. Sometimes we could fit ten of us, one on top of another, into this very special car. Eleanor and I did everything together down at Channing Hall, where Sunday school was held. When the church service began we would lead the little choir down the aisle, giggling all the way. She was on one side of the pulpit and I on the other, as I recall it, and we would remain giggling throughout. I don't ever remember Dr. Leavens scolding us, but I'm inclined to think that without comment they stopped having us lead the procession. In a way, it was kind of a note of local color in the church service.

When I was at Mills College, Dr. Leavens came over every Sunday and was the chaplain there. I had a sense of responsibility, or loyalty, towards him. He had done a number of things for me over the years, but perhaps the one I remembered most was when he introduced me to Albert Schweitzer. I remember

exactly where we were standing up at Echo Lake beside the stream when he handed me the Schweitzer book and talked about it. He had recognized my strong feelings about saving all life, and this was the first time I heard of anyone else feeling as I did. It made a great difference to me and gave me strength to carry out what I've really dedicated my life to.

So I was head of the chapel committee at Mills and always, without fail, attended every chapel meeting on Sunday evening. He had made a cross out of twisted juniper and that was the only church thing we had in the little chapel by the gate. It was a small group, but all of us were faithful.

Riess: How has that stuck with you, whatever sense of religion the Unitarian church gives you? And I'm not sure of what it does give you.

Owings: Well, I'm surprised you ask, for it has "stuck with me" all my life. It's an ethical form of teaching, a way of looking at life, people and the natural life of the world. Somehow, it's close to nature and to Schweitzer. It's also close to beauty and simplicity. It's the symbolism in the Bible and the psalms. Nothing fundamental.

Riess: As a child, what were your favorite books? Do you remember any influential authors?

Owings: Not authors, just the simple story. The first book that I read, and my mother brought it home so that I could learn to read it before I went to school, was The Dutch Twins. We'd read it after dinner in front of the fire. She had a present for me when I finished it. I'll get you the present she gave me. [leaves room]

[returns] Isn't it interesting that I still have it?

Riess: Yes, this beautiful little teapot.

Owings: Then, the book that made the deepest impression on me for its message was Lightfoot the Deer. It was a story of a deer and hunters, but a deer doing all the lovely things. It made an enormous impression upon me. I read it over and over and over. It probably did a lot to color my strong feeling for wildlife and to protect wildlife from hunters and so on.

Carmel Highlands, the Lion's Screech

Owings: Perhaps one of the highlights of my childhood was a time when my father rented a house in the Carmel Highlands, which was referred to as the Dutton Cottage. Do you know where the James house is, that beautiful stone house built on the cliff below the Highlands Inn? It was built stone by stone by the Greene Brothers, whose work as architects has long been admired. Well, the Dutton cottage was just across the road from it while it was being worked on. It was fantastic! So, we were climbing around that house and also the Criley house, another stone house on Gibson Beach. Later, Mac, my first husband, and I bought and lived in the Criley house with daughter Wendy in 1947.

But it was there, from the Dutton Cottage, that we made many trips down to Gibson Beach and up to the shores of Point Lobos by Bird Rocks to reach the tidepools and the sea gardens. I'd never seen anything to equal them in beauty and color. They had the pink coraline algae lining in these pools and then the purple and vermilion sea urchins and the anemone, and the snails and little scuttling rock crabs and bits of seaweed. After I saw that, it was the most wonderful "discovery" in my life and it somehow sealed my connection with the sea.

Riess: How old were you?

Owings: I was in the third grade. It was at that time that another thrilling thing occurred. In fact, many incidents occurred. I was becoming awake to so many things of nature!

Our rented house had a back bedroom with a little stairway leading up to a higher tiny room all by itself. My brother slept up there and I longed to sleep up there. Finally, the great night came when I was going to be allowed to sleep there. Even as I started to mount the stairs, I felt a little lonely about it, but I went right on boldly and got into bed. That was the night that a mountain lion came to the house below my open window and let out a screech! I bolted down into the bottom of my bed and spent the night there. I was too scared to jump out of bed and run down to my mother!

I wrote about that in a lion article in later years published in Pacific Discovery. It was a screech that I could only recall as being "death-defying"--difficult to define it properly. Little did I know that I was going to spend so much of my life devoted to the California mountain lion, trying to protect it.

The Sierra, and Echo Lake

Riess: Your father took you to the Carmel Highlands. What other trips did your family make together?

Owings: Well, we were taken on a trip to Yosemite when Billy and I were much younger. We had an old Cadillac, which was not a car of any great distinction, it was just a big, old and open canvas-topped Cadillac. We children would pump it for some reason, before it started.

Accommodations had been arranged at Camp Curry, and we had Rita with us to take care of the children. Going around one of those very narrow curves, the steering wheel broke and we went over the edge and got caught in a juniper. I don't remember the actual "going over"--maybe I was asleep or carsick--but I remember quite clearly what happened afterwards. We were able to climb out of the car, which was at a dangerous angle.

My father, who must have been terribly disturbed, was very calm with us. He helped us set up a kind of camp on a big slab of granite. There were chipmunks jerking around, and my father told Billy that if he could put a pinch of salt on the tail of a chipmunk, he could catch it. This took care of Billy for a long time, creeping up on the chipmunks. Rita was sick. And I was terribly excited about the chipmunks and little intimate things that were new to me, such as the tamarack cones and little bunches of wild phlox growing out of granite cracks.

I'm not bothering to tell you how my father got down to the valley and finally had the car pulled up and the steering wheel mended. Those things escaped me!

Another mountain experience was Echo Lake. That all began because Bill--no longer "Billy"--was sent to Kleeberger's Boys' Camp on Upper Echo Lake, above Tahoe. Mother asked if they didn't have a Girls' Camp, and they didn't, but they thought they might. So I was the first girl to be enrolled in the Kleeberger's Girls' Camp which was adjacent to the Boys' Camp. They were all Kleeberger girls and me. [laughter]

Then, Eleanor Leavens was brought up by her parents to the camp to visit me. Eleanor wanted to stay even though she was already enrolled in a girls' camp down on Tahoe. She had to wear a uniform, and her mother sewed her name tag on each of her garments. She hated it. So Eleanor stayed at Kleeberger's.

Next, our parents came up to see Bill and me. One might say they fell in love with Echo Lake, and they set about talking with the head forester to lease a cove--it was a ninety-nine year lease--where four cabins could be built.

Riess: Who were the other families?

Owings: Well, it was the Leavenses and the Seldon Smiths and the Tibbitses. They named it Dartmouth Cove. Although Tibbits was a ship's captain and he wasn't a Dartmouth man, he gave an air to the cove that otherwise remained pure Dartmouth. He used to fill his row-boat with its Evinrude motor with such a stock of material, as if he was stowing things for a great expedition at sea. [laughs] We almost fell on the ground, rolling with laughter when he came up one time with a great container of toilet paper almost too large for the boat!

II EDUCATION, AND MARRIAGE TO MALCOLM MILLARD

Bradford Academy

Riess: Tell me about your college years.

Owings: Well, my mother wanted me to go to Smith College. That was her Alma Mater. But the question was, "Could Margaret pass the college boards?" So we swung back to the Pond family. My grandfather's sister, Jean Pond, my great aunt, was head of the English department at Bradford Academy. She was also dean of the school. She was sent there as a young girl from Maine, and never left. She was quite a great woman, very highly respected.

So I found myself for a year at Bradford, which had just been changed to a junior college. It was in Bradford, Massachusetts, near Haverhill. The winter snow was exciting for me, but otherwise I found the experience quite depressing. We wore long black bloomers gathered below the knee with black stockings for gym. We could never be seen eating as we walked down the sidewalk. The principal drummed into our heads that the very word "eat" was vulgar.

We could never drive anyplace with a young man without a chaperone. A young man had the misfortune of coming to see me one evening. I was called from my room and met him in the front hall where we were ushered into a very stiff sitting room. We were told to sit in straight-backed chairs twenty feet apart. I wanted to laugh, I was so embarrassed. We looked at one another and were frozen into silence. It was awful. I was permitted this luxury only because I had come the farthest distance from home. A woman stood in the doorway, chaperoning us. The whole school was electrified by this incident. I went back to my room and shook with laughter.

When my great aunt died, Bradford established the Jean Pond Medal, and in 1975 they invited me to give the commencement address on the field of my interest. Needless to say, I spoke

about conservation, and I hammered the issues in. The junior college by that time was greatly improved, and there were both men and women students. The procession to the auditorium was lead by bagpipes over green lawns, and after my address I was given the Jean Pond Medal, which was a circle somehow completing itself.

Mills College, 1930-1934, and Aurelia Reinhardt

Riess: What happened about going to Smith College?

Owings: I didn't go to Smith. You see, this was the time of the deep Depression. My father had been on the Board of Trustees at Mills College. Mills was suffering financially. Many students had to drop out because their families became destitute. My father set out to help these students and he became comptroller, and then treasurer. I already knew Dr. Aurelia Reinhardt, the president, and her two sons, Paul and Frederick, had attended the Unitarian Sunday School along with Bill and me.

It seemed logical, at that time, that I go to Mills. I went to Mills happily. My brother, who had been preparing for the College Board exams for Dartmouth, decided to go to Stanford, primarily because he was in love with Harriet Peel and didn't want to be that far from her.

I'd hardly ever been over to Mills before I arrived as a freshman. I found I could choose my own room in Mills Hall, and I immediately grabbed everything I owned, dragged myself up to the third floor, and chose a nice little room with a big dormer window facing the campanile.

I had some very good friends at Mills, and it was comforting to have my father so active in his role as chairman of the Endowment Committee of the Board of Trustees. So many of the students were suffering from the Depression. They were about to be withdrawn by their parents, and my father set about finding the funds to have them remain on the campus. He used to say that his biggest boast was that he was an honorary member of the sophomore class. That class didn't forget Dad, and at their fiftieth anniversary they collected more funds in honor of my father's name--the most ever collected by an alumnae class--which was announced at commencement in 1987. All these "golden girls" were in their seventies, including myself. It was a prideful thing to hear them recall what Dad had done for them during the Depression.

He found Aurelia an extraordinary woman with a mind of her own and a voice of her own. She used dramatic statements to delve into a subject. She left an impression on all of us--to get ideas over, and then soar a little with Latin quotations, and then bring you back and go on with her message. Aurelia came close to being a "goddess," and yet with all her heights of classic knowledge she knew the name of every girl in the college and would address them so as she passed them on the college grounds.

Riess: There are murals at Mills by Ray Boynton. Was he teaching there?

Owings: I think not teaching, but the murals he did in the Music Hall were a wonderful background to everything that occurred there. We would go there and listen to Aurelia, or we would have Gershwin come and play for us, or Carl Sandburg reciting "The fog creeps in on little cat feet." It was an intimate kind of room, and you felt close to the people who were speaking or playing. Yehudi Menuhin, the young boy, came down from Santa Cruz where he lived and studied, and of course played beautifully. And there were many more.

Riess: Gershwin made Mills a stop?

Owings: Yes indeed, and we were so close we could watch his fingers on the keys and sense his personality.

Riess: Aurelia Reinhardt was able to draw this kind of person to Mills? Was it her presence?

Owings: You underestimate Aurelia! She was more than a presence.

Riess: Was she a warm person?

Owings: Oh yes, yes, but with a dignity. When I was in the infirmary, she would know it and send me the gardenia which had been pinned on her shoulder at a dinner party. And she wrote me constantly after I graduated, boxes of little notes and letters written in a tiny handwriting.

Riess: You said she had two sons at the Sunday school you attended. I didn't realize she had a family.

Owings: Yes. Her husband died when Paul and Frederick were very young, so she had a family to support and educate. She had a marvelous library in the President's House--and one might add to that, in the president's mind. Frederick, I believe, became a Rhodes Scholar, and was in the State Department for many years. Paul became an optometrist and married Ginny, a beautiful Mills girl,

and the two of them have actively contributed to the college for many years.

Roi Partridge and Imogen Cunningham

Riess: What did you study at Mills?

Owings: When I arrived at Mills, I went immediately to the art department.

Riess: Who were your teachers?

Owings: Roi Partridge was head of the department. He influenced me with his etched line. His eye was able to see where the outlines were and where the great spaces were and he put them together in a magnificent way. He left a deep impression on my own work. He also influenced me in commencing to paint in black and white in the Sierras.

Florence Minard was an excellent teacher. One rarely saw what she herself did; she concentrated on teaching us the hows and whys of perspective and form.

Riess: During the Mills years did you have any contact with Imogen Cunningham?

Owings: Oh yes, she was a free woman and determined in her ways and taste. She was married to Roi Partridge, and they had several sons. Our little art group used to go up to their house to talk. I always remember, now that I haven't smoked for a quarter of a century, they had a great turquoise bowl which we would all sit around that was piled with loose cigarettes. We hadn't really seen so many cigarettes at a time! [laughs] We'd light them, one at a time, and it seemed sort of avant-garde.

Imogen used to take photos of some of the students in the nude, leaning against a tree, etc. (It was a little like Alfred Stieglitz and O'Keeffe.) At any rate, Imogen was a very dear and talented little woman. She took a fancy to me, in a way, and always enjoyed my Christmas cards. She would come down here, and then she wanted to photograph me. I somehow just couldn't find the time. Finally I said to her, "Imogen, you've got to drape me in chiffon. I'm getting so old." [laughter] She looked at me quite crossly then. Later, Imogen sent me the little embroidered cap that she wore for years. It was a henna-red cloth with little mirrors, probably came from one of those far-east countries. She had attended a show of my stitcheries, Collage in Stitchery, at

the de Young Museum in San Francisco in 1963. The show was made up of three of us from Big Sur, Loet Vanderveen with ceramics, Gordon Newell with sculpture in stone--whose comment accompanying his work said, "One passes many rocks, but knows when one speaks"--and then there were my stitcheries. My comment said: "To make order out of heap of pebbles, a handful of grasses, a pile of threads or a basket of fabrics is my pleasure. To create my own textures with collages of old embroideries and braids, my palette." [See p. 91.]

Imogen attended the show several times, and then took off her cap and sent it to me in the mail. Her contribution. I couldn't cut it up. I have sent it with my file of letters to The Bancroft Library.

A Rescue, a Departure, and a Return

Riess: In your art classes were you sketching from nature, or was it studio?

Owings: It was both, but it was more design and studio work than sketching from nature. Influenced by Roi Partridge's etchings I began to do the black ink drawings. These began at Echo Lake, then became more intent when we first walked up from Tuolumne Meadows to Vogelsang [Yosemite National Park]. I don't know whether you know Vogelsang. It's about 10,000 feet high, magnificent country of granite, rushing water and lakes.

That place grew to mean the world to me! It had an impact like the sea pools, of beauty and excitement. We would go up there for a week. Most people would go through. Not us. We stayed on five days to a week, and kept on doing that from the second year Vogelsang was opened as a camp, my parents and Bill, followed by my years with Mac and Wendy, when she was old enough, then I introduced Nat and his son, young Nat, with Wendy and me.

When I married Nat I was then a diabetic and I had a notion that the best way for me to control insulin shock under the strain of hiking was to eat grapefruit, so I insisted that all of our little caravans carry grapefruit on their backs along with their packsacks. Nat and I also carried a bunch of books, and I carried my art supplies. But when we finally got there and picnicked, only Margaret would eat the grapefruit! Really, it was a terrible thing, but it was a glory of a time.

The last time we climbed up that trail I was breathless and felt my heart quite a bit. So the following summer we decided to

ride on horses. That was easy and quick, but too quick, apparently. That's what the doctor thought. I got off the horse and walked over to fill a pail of water and had a heart attack, and that was not so much fun.

They had a little oxygen there, and that helped my irregular breathing and pain. And there was a doctor up there who just happened to be passing through. He was a brick about things. And so were other people, including my stalwart friend, Marcia Lee Berg.

They sent for a helicopter at dawn. When it arrived I walked over to it. It was a marvelous helicopter because it was just air, you know, there was nothing around one. You just sat in this little plastic bubble without walls, strapped in with a seat belt. They started right up and then dropped down into one of those narrow granite canyons with springs running down through moss and shelves of rock holding old junipers clutching the little spot on which their lives had been spent with that chartreuse lichen on their limbs and bunches of paintbrush around their trunks.

It was intimate beauty, and the little helicopter almost touched these shelves with its propeller. I thought, oh, I'd like to get off here and stay to die. But I was taken to the Yosemite Hospital instead. That hospital no longer takes patients for anything but a stop-over, but they cared for me for five days, and Nat, who had hurried down from Vogelsang by foot, arrived at the hospital and finally drove me home.

Riess: It sounds both ecstatic, and yet more, close to death.

Owings: Can I tell you about a wonderful experience? And it sounds very strange to commence the statement I am about to make with that comment.

Riess: Of course, yes.

Owings: I had a heart attack down here in Big Sur and was taken in our Big Sur ambulance up to the community hospital. I became very ill on the way up. They laid me on the table in the emergency room and they phoned my doctor, but he hadn't arrived yet. The emergency doctor was taking X-rays of me, for some reason, and he pushed me over on my left side where my heart was struggling and burning.

I shouted "No," and at that point my heart stopped beating. This was when I had this beautiful experience. In all my life, it was probably the most beautiful experience I have been privileged to know. I was released from the struggle and floated in space with oblong shapes of sky-blue, canary yellow and spring-green

moving about me, and all physical feelings were gone. It was somehow like the arms of the world were around me, and I sensed great peace and love--which we long for but rarely find. I did not want to return. After my doctor arrived and kept calling my name loudly through my soft bliss, I returned. But I returned a different person, for I had seen through to the other side and now am no longer afraid of death.

Riess: That's so interesting. I have read about similar experiences.

Europe with the Family

Riess: You mentioned a family trip to Europe during your years at the Anna Head School, before the Depression.

Owings: Well, of course it was a hundred-fold experience. My parents, my grandmother, my brother and I sailed across the Atlantic and landed in Cherbourg. It was a very cold mid-winter and we were first introduced to Paris at the Regina Hotel where everything seemed "gold," including the elevator, and our Louis Quatorze suite.

My brother immediately wanted to go to the top of the Eiffel Tower, and we went to see the Mona Lisa and went to hear Maurice Chevalier singing and joking at the Moulin Rouge. We did those things.

Then, we hired a big car with a chauffeur in his separate section in front. We drove down the Loire and visited the world of chateaux. I can't remember seeing a single tourist along the way. The chateaux were so cold and empty, I only recall large French women standing at the entrances beside small iron braziers with hot coals to keep them from freezing. No fires burned in any of the fireplaces, and I tried to imagine myself walking about in full-skirted heavy velvet garments to keep alive. (But this isn't a report on art history, it's simply how we made our way through it.)

Our destiny was Pau, in the Basse Pyrenees, in the Basque country. It had been arranged because there was a school in Pau called Park Lodge where my brother Bill could study for his college board examinations for Dartmouth. I was sent to the College d'Jeune Filles in town and was placed in a class of much younger students than myself. All the work was memory work and even I finally learned to recite long French poems by the masters. To this day, I can recite much of a poem about Napoleon which I

learned at that school where all the girls wore identical tan smocks or black ones, depending on the death of any member of the family. Black smocks, black stockings, black shoes and black gloves. It seemed as if the bell was always tolling. The biggest excitement of the winter was when hail balls fell, so large they broke all the windows on one side of the school.

Bill and I lived with my Grandmother Pond at Beaumont House, a cold pension from which we could view the Pyrenees, white with snow. My grandmother was so cold, she used to wear something like galoshes lined with fur to bed at night. They were something she had worn as a young woman in Massachusetts.

It was then I met an American girl whose father was the head of Vogue magazine in Paris. Need I say, we both spoke English.

My brother's and my happiest times were when we boarded a bus and went up to Eaux Bonne in the Pyrenees where we were surrounded by French skiers drinking red wine squeezed out of animal skins as they shouted and laughed around a peasant's hut. I asked someone what they were shouting as they raced down the slopes, and the answer was "pigs!" The large peasant woman in the stone hut had a fireplace the size of one wall of the house over which hung a pot the size of a jacuzzi bath, bubbling with a stew of God-knows-what and tasting wonderful. The skiers stood on a huge table and cut with a knife smoked meats and sausages which hung from the rafters.

My parents had gone to Egypt while all this was going on, and they went up to Karnak and Luxor on the Nile. We left Pau and went down to meet them in Rome where my brother and I climbed to the top of St. Peter's Cathedral. Years later, I was to spend much time in Rome, so I'll slip by it now. But when we reached Naples, Vesuvius was erupting in a manner that caused my father to hire a fishing boat at sunset to go out into the Bay of Naples to watch a radiant sunset explode through the clouds.

A Trip to Japan and China

Owings: I had been thinking of museum work as a career when I was at Mills. Dr. Brinton had been my teacher, and we were especially dealing with oriental art in readiness for my trip to the Japan-American Student Peace Conference in Japan directly after I graduated from Mills [1934].

There were American students from a number of colleges such as Harvard, Smith, Wellesley, Stanford, Occidental, Reed, and Mills, etc. I went with Shirley Smith who lived on our road, the daughter of Seldon Smith and sister of David Smith. Shirley was from Wellesley, and I represented Mills.

The Japanese students were in earnest about peace, but their government observed us with great suspicion. When it came to taking a vote at Aoyama Gukuin University on whether we would go to war if a war commenced, all of the Americans voted "no," and all of the Japanese students remained silent with bowed heads. But we had many beautiful sights, art objects and gardens, ending with a visit into a large cave outside of Shiminoseki where our old rowboat sank into a river inside the cave and torches of fire were held to help us make our way out just when thousands of bats with wide wings were flying out into the night sky over our heads.

Shirley and I then took a boat to Tientsin, China, and went to the American-Chinese Language School in Peking where Dr. and Mrs. Petus were in charge and my father was one of the trustees. If I were to tell you all that happened to us in China it would take chapters, but briefly I must tell you that Shirley and I were intrigued by the narrow roads in Peking and the rickshaws, the temples and art collections in the Imperial Palace, our trip to the Great Wall in the rain (almost completely alone), and our final trip down the Yangtze River in a boat filled with Chinese smoking opium until we reached Shanghai.

Museum Studies at the Fogg, 1935

Owings: My decision to study at the Fogg Museum grew out of advice from Thomas Carr Howe, who was assistant director of the Legion of Honor in San Francisco. He was very learned, and he had taken Paul Sachs's museum course at the Fogg at Harvard. He said, "Margaret, that is what you should do." So I wrote to request to join Sachs's class. He nearly always had just directors of art museums who came to get a refresher course, and here was this nobody applying.

It never occurred to me that I might not be admitted--I was so much younger and more inexperienced than the ten to twelve applicants. When I met Sachs and he said to me, "Well, as long as you're here I guess you're here," I was surprised. I had come with good letters of recommendation, which apparently he hadn't read.

Did I tell you what happened the first week I was there, before my trunk arrived?

Riess: No.

Owings: At our first class, he said, "I want you to memorize the total museum before next week." Visual memory was his theme. So, one would enter a gallery and visually recall a Degas dancer, a Botticelli hand, a Corot landscape--not necessarily in that order --room after room. Then I got to the Nuremberg room, an entire paneled room brought from Germany with paintings, sculpture and old furniture where our class held most of its meetings. A Harvard student was with me and he commented, "I think there's a hidden closet here." I said, "Don't tell me where it is. Let me find it."

So I went around and I found a button behind something, and I pressed the button. It was the burglar alarm system. He said, "I think you pressed the burglar alarm." I said, "I don't hear anything," so I pressed it again! [laughter] And immediately, of course, bedlam all over. The big police dogs were brought up from the basement, the Cambridge police, the Boston police, and Sachs led the way into the Nuremberg room.

It was a very low doorway and he was a very short man. He filled the whole doorway. I stood there with this young Harvard man and Sachs said, "Who pressed the burglar alarm?" I said, "I did." He had a terrible temper--I'd never experienced a temper before because my parents were always very soft-spoken and I hardly ever heard really cross words in my life--and he let fly.

I just looked at him. I couldn't even tell him that I was trying to learn the museum, but I stood there and he gave it to me. Then he turned and left, and I could see the different faces that I knew in the library and so on looking at me with great pity. I thought, "Well, I'll have to go back." My trunk had just arrived--we had trunks then--"I'll have to just send it home. I'll just have to go home." The young man who was with me said, "He always will come back and apologize when he has a temper." I said, "This time he won't."

I was still standing there with the tears running down my cheeks, thinking the end of the world had come, when Sachs reappeared in the doorway. He said, "I've thought it over, and I've realized that you were exploring every part of this room, and that's why you pressed that button, and that was your assignment, to know the museum."

So I escaped that one, but it really took a great deal out of me, and it made an impression on the whole museum. For a while they used to talk about "the time that Margaret rang the burglar alarm." After a bit a Harvard student wrote a novel about a robbery at the Fogg, and this upset the museum. Not long afterwards a very serious robbery took place, much of which was based on the safeguard weaknesses portrayed in the novel. But I was out of the picture at that time.

Riess: But they'd had a little drill for it anyway.

Owings: They'd had their little drill. [laughter]

Riess: Where did you live when you were at Harvard?

Owings: I lived in the Brattle Inn. When I was at Mills I did so many extracurricular activities and I was on every board. I was president of the hall, and I was doing all those things, and it seemed kind of silly after a while. When I went to Radcliffe I didn't want to get involved in anything, but just have the freedom to work. I never saw a dormitory the entire time I was there! I went down the street and I saw Brattle Inn. I went in and asked if they had a room, that I was a Radcliffe student, and yes, I could do it alone. So I did it. That was good, too. I worked terribly hard and worked late at night, but I just had this thirst for knowledge.

Riess: A book came out last year celebrating the opening of the Sackler Museum at Harvard. The book is titled Modern Art at Harvard and it starts out with the history of the Fogg and the Germanic Museum and all of the museums at Harvard, so it had quite a bit to say about Sachs and about the other person there, Edward Waldo Forbes.

Owings: Forbes, yes, I studied with Forbes, a kind, fatherly man. Techniques in art I studied with him. We used everything from the wolf's tooth to burnish gold leaf as they did in the past, everything was just done the way it used to be done in the golden age. Another man restored paintings and was working on a Holbein damaged in shipment. I learned a little from him as well. But that was the only actual brush-in-hand, as it were, that I did while there.

Riess: You enjoyed the work there?

Owings: Oh, I just loved everything about it. It was the richest, most wonderful year of learning. We went to all the private homes and big collections, and at Easter we went for a week to New York and went to the Lehmans's and the Stephen Clarks's, and all the big collections with Sachs.

Riess: The people who were experienced museum curators and so on, what were they getting out of it?

Owings: Well, they all became directors of museums.

Paul Sachs said on parting--and this was despite the Depression years--"Don't volunteer. You must go in as a professional."

Of course, I did volunteer. I went up to the Legion of Honor and I catalogued Albert Bender's oriental objects. They were in the basement of the museum at the Legion of Honor. I did that for six months because I'd studied the way those catalogues are put together from the Eumorfopoulos Collection under Fogg training.

Museum Work, San Francisco Museum of Art

Owings: Then, after that, I came to the San Francisco Museum of Art. They had no money, but they could give me forty dollars a month. The forty dollars of course I spent entirely on what I was doing there. I gave lectures, and I put on a show of techniques from my experience with Forbes.

Then I started children's classes. We got a big dragon of black and white, almost like a rubbing of a dragon, and we put it on all the cable cars and street cars advertising the children's art classes. "Free." I wanted everything free. I didn't want them to charge anything.

I went around with my forty dollars and I bought old, second-hand restaurant supplies--there are places where they sell these things--little dishes, you know, for paint, and so forth. And then I bought powdered colors and I mixed them in five-gallon cans for the colors. I had a Scandinavian man down in the basement who was great and built me a big trailer on wheels for carrying supplies that I could roll around in the museum.

I thought probably two hundred children might come to the classes. That seemed like an awful lot. Over six hundred arrived and were registered the first day! It was bedlam because the police couldn't handle the traffic outside, and the children got lost, and their mothers all came with them making a good thousand in the museum. The second week after that I put up a sign, "No Mothers Allowed Upstairs Until After It's Over." I was a little

blunt about this but I got someone to lecture to the mothers in a room downstairs with slides.

I spent my nights at the YWCA so that I could think at night, because I left the museum at ten, when it closed, and was back there at eight in the morning. In between I thought of these classes: some would be figure classes, and some black and white, and then I'd have some classes that you just had yellow and blue, and they'd find out that they could make green. Then I had red, and that kind of thing. Then I had classes with music. It was really a workout.

I had to have little colored tags for the children. They all wore their little tags. And then a whole section devoted itself to children who have lost their tags! Red tags would follow the red arrow. They were all tinies, you see, and they'd "follow the red arrows" until they got to their room.

Grace Morley, who was director then, had been away at the beginning. I think she came the second time, and when she saw the incredible thing that I had put together, she almost fainted. It was like driving sheep because you have to start the kids off in single lines of ropes marked by the right colors. And then the tags and the arrows everywhere. Oh God! But she adjusted to it.

Riess: Sounds wonderful.

Owings: I did it with great enthusiasm. I had no one to help me, so I did it with WPA people and my friends. Every friend who was willing to come I got over there, and they were great!

Riess: That kind of proselytizing spirit, did that come out of Sachs's classes?

Owings: No, that didn't, that didn't. This was so different. That's a funny thing. I'd gotten all these thoughts in my mind about collections and all the different aspects of museums and thoughts of that sort, and preparing catalogues, I had a lot of material, and that's the kind of thing I was studying and preparing for [laughs], and instead I ended up doing this incredible monstrous project.

Riess: Had you met Albert Bender at Mills?

Owings: My parents met him first, at Mills. Then during the time when I worked at the Legion of Honor and at the Museum of Modern Art he became a great friend of mine. He was always bringing me gifts. I stayed in his apartment. He had a penthouse apartment, and I could always stay there with him. So we became great friends. A

number of things in this house belonged to him. He was an extraordinary little man.

Malcolm Millard, and Carmel

Owings: When I was at the San Francisco Museum, I became sidetracked from my work when Malcolm Millard came out from Chicago and we were married in the garden of my parent's home in Berkeley, August 5, 1937. After a honeymoon in Mexico, we settled in Chicago. And, need I say, I was homesick for the West Coast, but Mac and I came out to Carmel on our vacations.

Riess: You had been in Carmel Highlands much earlier, of course.

Owings: Yes, and my first memories of Carmel were only feelings, for I was brought down in a blanket as a baby. Photographs show me sitting on the Carmel beach with my Grandfather Pond. We would stay at the Pine Inn, which didn't have quite the Victorian elegance that it has now. Ocean Avenue was just dirt and sand and there weren't rocks around the trees, they were just growing here and there in the dirt and sand. It had a marvelous, rough character of its own, with the great white beach and very few people.

I'll tell you something interesting. When I brought Mac [Malcolm Millard] out here, I'd talked so much about the sea gardens and I wanted to show him the sea gardens. It was during World War II, and we went over to Point Lobos and were surprised to find men in camouflage uniforms all through the bushes and with guns sticking out. That startled us, but we decided to keep on walking because I was insistent that we go to the sea gardens.

We went to the sea gardens and so much oil had spilled from boats and so on that they were absolutely gone, they were lined with black tar and oil. I looked and there was nothing left, and I thought, "This is it. This is the end. This is the way it's going to be." Gradually it came back. I've never felt it was as beautiful, though, as it was before that terrible drenching of oil and what looked like tar.

Riess: Your husband had never been to Point Lobos before?

Owings: No, I think not. But he brought me to Big Sur because his father had built a cabin south of here. He and a golfer friend, Walter Egan--we all called him Uncle Walt--had walked the ridge all the way along. The road wasn't in here. And his father just fell in love with the place and wanted to have a cabin someday.

When he left to go back to Chicago he picked up a Pine Cone, the Carmel paper, to read on the train. It had an ad in it that said something like, "Twenty acres for sale in Big Sur-Lafler Canyon." He got off the train in Cheyenne and telegraphed Uncle Walt and said, "Whatever it is, just buy it." Uncle Walt did buy it, but they had to wait quite a while before they could go and find it. When they found it, of course it was all cliff.

They built what they called Hangover Hut. The old-timers here put it together with redwood, and it was a glorious place to go. Mac brought me to see it before we were married. He came out to meet my family. We came down here and we went up to the cabin. It was heaven on earth. A path, we call it Sunset Trail, led from the canyon along the hill slope. We stopped, and we looked down at this point [Grimes Point]. We could hear the sea lions barking, just the way we hear them from this house.

It really was my introduction to Big Sur. I had been down earlier as far as the road would go. They were just making the road. They were blasting out Lafler Canyon at the time when Mac first took me there. It was a beautiful canyon with a beautiful waterfall spilling out under the road. They blasted one side of the mountain, and they blasted the other side of the mountain, so that the earth and rocks would fall in on top of these marvelous redwood trees. This was really the beginning of all my tree fighting up in Humboldt County. It was awful! The road was very, very bad, and when we came to the end, they rushed up and stopped us because the explosions were going to take place. We saw it happen!

During the ten years I was in Chicago I was kept alive by thinking about that place, that I could go back there. And it came to pass.

Ten Years in Illinois

Riess: Tell me more about your former husband, if you would.

Owings: I met him when I was in Cambridge as a graduate student. He was at Harvard, two years behind me.

He had been brought up in Highland Park in Illinois. His father and grandfather were men of great character. They had floated logs of big trees down Lake Michigan from Wisconsin to make a large log house right on the lake. It was well known as

the log house, with a big stone fireplace at each end. His father was a lawyer. He had his own printing press, the kind that you put the letters in by little prongs. All the things his father was interested in were things that I would have liked. I never met him, he died the year before I met Mac.

His mother was a very strong-willed woman. What she said, went. That was a difficulty for me.

Riess: But in you she ran up against someone as strong as she?

Owings: Oh no, I became absolutely milk toast.

Then we moved over to a place called Ravinoaks [Highland Park], which was where his grandmother lived. It was one of those great turreted castles on the edge of Lake Michigan, a beautiful place of its period. It was a big, formal, family place and I was absorbed into it, and I was very unhappy there. It was run by help that had been there forty years and did everything exactly the same. It deadened me, and it took all the creative thing out of me. I wasn't free, I had no freedom whatsoever. There was nothing I could do. I didn't have a car. I was driven by a chauffeur in uniform. Everything that was done for me only wounded me.

Riess: You lived there with Mac and with your mother-in-law?

Owings: And with the grandmother, and with Mac's brother, Chevy, who was one of life's startling creations, a near genius bursting on every side of his body, his drive, his imagination and his activities. He was very musical, played in his own orchestra, and threw himself into everything. He was very difficult to get along with, did nothing but argue in a hateful way, so that I became completely silent when he was there. It was very difficult indeed. At the big table with all the family there, I would not say a word.

Riess: Wasn't there any choice for Mac in the beginning not to go back home?

Owings: He seemed to think it was all right. His mother meant everything to him, and she was the one who handed things out, you see. So that's why I wanted to get away, and I was the one who talked him into building a house near the Des Plaines River where his father had land owned jointly with a fine group of families. He didn't think we should. He said, "It's too far." I said, "What is it too far from?" He said, "It's too far from home." It was about seven miles away.

We built a redwood house there. It was surrounded by beautiful thorn trees that were white in blossom, and crabapple trees that were pink. We named it Thornmeadow. My child Wendy [Anne Wentworth Millard] was taken there directly after her birth in Highland Park, and two years later the war hit us. Mac enlisted in the navy and went down to Mississippi for training and became an ensign on merchant marine ships. This took him as a guard through dangerous submarine waters to England and to Russia.

But in the time I was bringing up Wendy at Thornmeadow, I began to write a series of nature vignettes or just letters. And Dr. Aurelia Reinhardt wrote to me often. She knew I was unhappy because she had come to visit me when I was in Ravinoaks, the big place, and she stayed for lunch with my mother-in-law and me. She saw me sitting there absolutely silent, and she was worried about me. When I moved out and we built this little redwood house out there on the river I used to send her things that I wrote, and I used to paint the birds. I loved the warbler migrations and painted a mural over our fireplace which included a large magnolia warbler.

After Mac's Grandmother Boynton died at Ravinoaks--and she died just as the loud belltower on the property struck eight--plans got under way to sell the property, which could be used for a housing development. Chevy worked on it and divided the property, and Ravinoaks was torn down. I went there and I stood on the mounds. They had taken a great deal of it away. I don't know what happened to it all, all those details of that style of house at that period, and there were always chimneys, many fireplaces, many chimneys going up. Part of the chimneys were left, and I stood there. It was almost--well, I'd finished with something, and it was almost like a war that had been ended.

But to turn back in time, while Mac was studying law in Chicago we became friends with David Rockefeller, who was studying for a master's degree at the University of Chicago. He came to see us. I liked him so much. He was simple and nice. We would go out at night with a flashlight because he loved insects and beetles--any insect or beetle he would get very excited about. When we would take him to the log cabin that Mac's father had built, he would run his flashlight along the top of the chimney, and I would say, "Look, look!" and he would say, "Oh no, they're just cockroaches." That surprised me. I didn't know we had cockroaches. Anyway, I was very fond of David.

Then he married Peggy. I was very fond of her, too, a woman with a tremendous good sense of humor. During the war years David entered the war as a private. He went through the whole thing. He didn't ask for any special treatment whatsoever. He was away

then for a long period of time. Mac was away. So Peggy and I lived together out in Tarrytown [New York]. Her first baby, David, was born there. Wendy was with her grandmother during this period.

When I returned to our home on the Des Plaines River, I started teaching woodcarving as therapy for the amputees in the navy hospital. That was new for me. I did that for a year. I learned to do the forms myself so that they could get ideas. I worked on them at home at night. I'd have some rough pieces cut out, and I would go around with my tray, because they couldn't walk around. I loaned them my tools. I also began to do woodcarving on my own of the chipmunks and the different animals.

Riess: Too bad you never knew Mac's father.

Owings: I would love to have known him. Mac always used to say, "Isn't it too bad you didn't know my father?" He had been closely involved in the log house on the lake, and then built a log house on the river, and he loved the plants and loved the trees, and worked hard on trying to save the [Michigan] dunes. In fact, he was really a leader in trying to save the dunes, which were partially saved. I don't know what their status is now, but that was a lovely area on Lake Michigan there, without people. He wrote poetry about the sandpiper and different things, and wrote articles for magazines about nature things.

Mac himself built the log fences like the Lincoln log fences. He built a lamp made out of the hub of a wagon wheel. He liked to split wood and liked to saw wood. My father thought it was the funniest thing he had ever heard of when the first year we were out at the little house we built, Mac made me for my Christmas present one of these things to put wood in so that I could split and saw it.

Riess: You were splitting wood too?

Owings: Yes, I was doing a lot of the work, and I laid a brick walk.

Riess: How did Mac actually meet you?

Owings: I don't know how he happened to wander into the Fogg Museum library. He just wandered in, and he saw me and he just knew that was that. He took me out to visit Andover where he had gone to school. We went to an arboretum there. He was pointing out different trees to me. I knew perfectly well this was the man I was going to marry.

Riess: Right away.

Owings: Yes. Mac had a pioneer quality that was admirable.

I drew up the plans for the house on the river. Mac grew to appreciate the wildflowers and the things that were there, a great deal. However, we had a great many rattlesnakes there, which became somewhat of a problem with little Wendy. I worried about her to the point that the herpetologist down at the Chicago Museum of Science knew that we were the people who had the rattlesnakes. Students would come out to catch snakes. Sometimes I would follow them along, because I would worry about them. They were little boys, and they would get money if they caught a rattlesnake in a hemp bag. They would crawl under a cabin out there and, of course, rattle, rattle, and so it was kind of scary.

Our nearest neighbors there were the Hanks, who lived across the river. Mrs. Hank would go out to call the cows. They had three cows, and she had names for each of them. She would call them in to put them in the barn at night.

Riess: Did Mac encourage you in your art when you were there?

Owings: Yes, he encouraged me. I was married to him when I started to work on the John Muir book. But it was Nat Owings who later took it up and said, "Look, now, let's get organized. You can go to this person and that person to help get it published. Maybe you should present it this way, or maybe you should present it that way."

Riess: Do you want to say anything about Mac?

Owings: Yes, our divorce startled and hurt me. It was another woman, and he married her directly after the divorce was finalized. He has been married several times, but now he is alone.

He's very friendly. When he goes down to Lafler Canyon to his cabin to work, he always rushes over and puts his hat on a stick, which I can see from my house, to let me know that he's there. Then he likes to stop by on Sunday for a drink or something. He's about to retire now. He has been successful in his legal work. He bought an adobe house up the Carmel Valley that I knew when I was very young. He has been doing a beautiful job on that. All these things are good for him.

Above: Grandmother, Margaret Hill Wentworth, outside her house in Chelsea, Massachusetts.

Above right: Mother, Jean Pond Wentworth, on her wedding day, South Bend, Indiana, 1916.

Right: Grandmother, Cornelia Sanderson Pond, at the wedding of her daughter.

Margaret, two years old, sweeping the front steps and sidewalk, Ellsworth Street, Berkeley.

1919: Billy Wentworth, eight years old.
Margaret Wentworth, six years old.

1926: Bill and Margaret, Yosemite.

Left: Margaret Wentworth in the art studio, Mills College, 1933.

Above: Frank W. Wentworth (father), Mills College Trustee, 1933

Photograph by Imogen Cunningham

Margaret and Malcolm Millard, war years, New York City.

Wendy Millard, twenty years old, 1960.

Margaret, Malcolm, and Wendy together, 195
with "Albert" (named after Albert Bender).

Margaret Owings, on the day she was designated "Distinguished Woman of 1965" by the San Francisco Examiner. Mrs. Owings is carrying her dog "Comfort," whom she notes "travelled with [her] most of the time."

Right: Nathaniel Owings, Big Sur, 1956.

Margaret Owings, at work on Chalice, a stichery piece. At her side, her dog "Comfort." Circa 1965.

Photograph by Wynn Bulloch

III THE WRITTEN WORD

[Interview 2: August 5, 1986]

Freya Stark

Owings: It's hard for me to sit here letting my mind either go blank or just roll around, because I sit always in front of a typewriter to write. Without it I feel quite lost, really. But I'll tell you what I thought about last night in the night--and when I got up this morning I typed it up!

This is just a way to lead to different things, and that is, the writers that have meant the most to me, or that I've learned the most from, or who have inspired me the most. They've become part of my thinking.

I've been a great admirer of Freya Stark. The first book I read of hers was Perseus in the Wind, and I was just exhilarated beyond all measure. It's not only beautiful writing, but it's filled with depth. The depth of philosophy and wisdom, and advice as well. But her freedom of flowing with these ideas--. Are you aware of her?

Riess: No.

Owings: I could loan you Perseus in the Wind. I think I have others, because I read most everything she wrote. She, for example, went alone through Abyssinia on camelback and had all kinds of adventures and times for thought and moments for magnificent descriptions which she put down in her notebooks. She must have kept just some rough notebooks, and when she came home she sat down and would put together the imprints of her excursions.

Nat and I went to see her when we were going to Lake Como one time. We went to the town that she was living in, Aosta, and she, alas, had been taken to the hospital in London, and therefore we

missed her. It would have been one of my great moments in life to have met her.

She was a woman who had what many people would have considered an enormous impediment. Her beautiful mother had married again to a man who was extraordinarily cruel to the two daughters. He had a kind of mill thing, and the girls had long hair, and her [Freya's] hair caught in this big wheel and part of her face was torn off, and her hair on one side of her head.

It was the kind of accident that would have made the victims withdraw into themselves, and probably she did for quite a period of time. Then she realized she could express herself, and she also found an older man who taught her about nature and they hiked together in the Alps. He meant more to her, and directed more of her observations, than anyone else during her lifetime. She had that handicap, but she rose above it into this magnificent, magnificent mind.

Riess: Didn't Sally Carrighar also have a dreadful story in her life?

Owings: Yes, she did. I was an admirer of Sally Carrighar's and wrote to her once suggesting she come and live in our house, when I lived in the Carmel Highlands, and write some stories like One Day on Beetle Rock focusing on some of the tidepools in Point Lobos. She wrote back that she couldn't do it then. She was going up to the Grand Tetons, I think to write One Day in Teton Marsh.

But Perseus in the Wind is more poetic, and the use of words is extraordinary.

Riess: How were you introduced to her writing?

Owings: I think I actually stumbled over it, which is a nice way, you know, to turn a corner and find something so arresting.

Isak Dinesen

Owings: My second one is Isak Dinesen, or Karen Blixen. Of course we've recently seen Out of Africa. I loved that book. East Africa, the land, meant so much to me anyway. Going to her house and being able to see her furniture, which is partially there, seeing the initials of Denys Finch Hatton in brass on some of the furniture, was a reminder of his untimely death just as Karen had lost her farm and was leaving for Denmark.

I've had Robert Redford here--he took the part of Denys in the film Out of Africa. He has come a number of times. We love to talk about Isak Dinesen and Denys Finch Hatton, and he said, "Well, there's this marvelous book, Silence Will Speak [by Errol Trzebinski]. It's about Denys Finch Hatton." Redford sent the book to me.

Karen Blixen, whom they called Tania, loved him so much, was so deeply in love with him, she didn't want to spill it out into her book on Africa, so Denys was "he" came or "he" went, or little tiny vignettes. But in Silence Will Speak you find a great deal more.

Karen threw all of his letters away, burned all of her letters before she left Africa. But here we find that she describes Denys in many characters of her Gothic Tales and in those books that she wrote, of which she wrote a great many. I think Nat and I read aloud most of them, but I didn't know that Denys was appearing in different characters. These are pointed out in this book, and so it makes him more understandable and more of a complete person.

Riess: You liked both the Africa story and the tales?

Owings: Yes, well the tales are absolute fantasy with incredible word pictures and exotic drama--the lovely ladies walking down the aisles of trees and their conversations and all those things intrigue me a great deal.

Sigurd Olson

Owings: The next one I thought of was Sigurd Olson, who wrote about the voyageurs. He was one of the founders of the Wilderness Society. He lived in Ely, Minnesota. His whole life was primarily in a canoe, and then gradually he began writing. He wrote beautiful and thoughtful things, so many delightful pieces that had almost a sort of pixie quality, if you know his writing. It is just so lovely.

Riess: Did he have that quality in person?

Owings: Yes, he could sit back hearing the pipes of Pan.

He was on the national parks advisory board [1960-1965] with my husband Nat, and that's how I met him. I think we met him first in the West Indies where we were going to see all those

islands that had parks on them that the Rockefellers had given, and so on. We were thrown together with Sigurd. We met him many times, and then they came and stayed here in Big Sur for a while, and I think they came and stayed with us out in New Mexico as well, and I became sort of a special friend of Elizabeth, his wife, who was a dear, dear woman.

He had a strong, steady voice, a wonderful voice, a Danish voice. Those photographs that were taken of him that one sees often were exactly like Sig. They weren't taken many years before he died [1982]; he was well along then and beginning to lose his hearing. He had great strength.

We were on programs together. One was in 1967 on the tule elk, and he was the main speaker. Beula Edmiston had arranged it down in Los Angeles. I would like to have my words, entitled, "This Moment of Time" included in this book. [See facing page.]

Another time, which had a bit of humor, there was a Wilderness Conference in San Francisco with the Sierra Club [1965]. Peggy Wayburn had put it together. Some of us were given some of the speeches that were to be spoken around ours. They sent me, among others, Sigurd Olson's speech, and then Peggy said, "You will be following Sigurd Olson."

"Great," I said, and so I read Sigurd Olson's statements, which were marvelous. Then they changed the order of speakers, so I ended up in my speech, in the last line, saying, "As Sigurd Olson has just said..."-- and then this strong statement from Sigurd Olson! And here he was just about to stand up and start! He told Elizabeth, his wife, that he had never gone to a speech where the speech had been given before him. [See appendix.]

He always saw so much that we didn't see. We were walking in Washington, D.C., and he'd hear a raven. "Oh, there's a raven!" No one else in all of that city was looking up at this big raven going by. It made him feel at home. He was very, very much aware of everything that goes on and very much aware of the beautiful things, the natural things of the world.

He helped me in 1967 at the time I was working on the removal of the mountain lion bounty. He wrote a beautiful passage that I have. He only had a bit of time. He went downstairs and he sat at my desk and he wrote it like that. [snaps fingers] He brought it up and handed it to me, and he said, "I don't know whether this will help, Margaret." I used it year after year after year.

THIS MOMENT OF TIME

My words shall be few —

One, is a word of gratitude for *a privilege* — the privilege of living in our land — this century — this decade — this year — this moment of time.

A time — when a Condor quill can drift down from a great wheeling bird;

A time — when sea-otter are rocked in the kelp by the moving tides;

A time — one can follow the soft-padded track of the mountain lion — along the stream beds in the Lucia range;

— when one can still hear the circling call of coyotes at nightfall on the Anza Borrega desert;

A time — when the loveliness of motion of the Tule Elk can thread itself out into fields of the Owens Valley.

Yes, we can still find an atmosphere of unlimited freedom in a living landscape at this time.

Yet, this privilege has become a target.
grain soaked in 1080 poison
cyanide guns placed by trappers
pesticides contaminating the environment
the gun-in-hand

And the wild, beautiful habitat of wildlife — is intruded by ingenuity, by roads and machinery. The agent is man.

And, the target is as clear as an archery-range — for, the time — the place — and the habits are studied and understood.

As Albert Schweitzer once observed "Life is not random — but predictable in its rituals."
Thus — to the word "PRIVILEGE" — I add the word

"OBLIGATION".
The obligation not alone to shield the target — but to unblock the moral vision. And this alone can be done — by the slow — steady — noble courage of the few.

For only then can man define *THIS PRIVILEGE* which rewards him (in the words of Sigurd Olson) — "with a certain feeling of wholeness and fulfillment".

MARGARET OWINGS
the Tule Elk Banquet
March 4, 1967
Los Angeles

COMMITTEE FOR THE PRESERVATION OF THE TULE ELK
5502 Markland Drive, Los Angeles, California 90022

Most of the legislators tended not to know who Sigurd Olson was, but they must have understood from the passage that he was a man of great thought and quality and breadth and a beautiful guy.

Would you object to my reading this?

> The mountain lion epitomizes the old wilderness of California. It stands proudly alone at the very apex of a vast assemblage of living things in an interwoven relationship extending over eons of time. If it is lost, we may still have wilderness, but one with its uniqueness and savor gone. We need reminders of the old freedoms and beauties to give us a sense of balance and continuity in a swiftly changing world. The mountain lion is such a reminder, the key to the total picture of life as it is.

Riess: Was his role primarily as a kind of conscience?

Owings: Perhaps, but of course he was a great activist. Well, he wasn't one to rush into legislatures unless he was called in to do so with the Wilderness Society. By activist I mean tramping with a small pack on his back, and a canoe, away for weeks or a month. Every cell in his body was of the out-of-doors. He lived in a little house there in Ely.

The last time I saw him he brought me a picture of the little house in Ely because he knew about my little studio down below us here in Big Sur. He said, "I want to show you the little house that I write in." It was about the size of a garage for a Volkswagen, a little, white house with a window and a door. He had come to Washington in the spring, but the snow was laying so heavily in upper Minnesota that the house was completely covered with snow, and he just dug this hole out from his door.

He died in 1982. He had put on his snowshoes and gone out over the deep snow, and died. He had a little heart problem, but didn't talk about it. He had said in an earlier book when he talked about the four ages of man, "When there are no longer any beckoning mirages ahead, a man dies." He had won a great many things up there in the lakes, but he had also lost and been hurt by them.

He wrote to me a lot, so I have a lot of handwritten letters. They were always related to what we were doing, or if I got an award he always saw it and would say nice things about that, and then talk about other things.

National Parks Advisory Board

Riess: It's interesting to me that it was Nat who brought some of those wilderness and environmental people into your life. I had assumed it would have been the other way around.

Owings: Yes. The national parks advisory committee was a very broadening and wonderfully rich experience for Nat, immensely broadening and deep for him. And whenever Nat felt a thing he felt it so strongly he let everyone know, rarely holding back any feelings that might offend some people.

Of course after [James B.] Watt came in as Secretary of Interior, that whole council really disbanded. Marian Heiskell--she was a Sulzberger, and her family owned the New York Times--she married Andrew Heiskell, and he published Time magazine. Marian and others were always fighting the inholders in parks. The inholders, under Watt, got into the picture, and they were on the advisory board and the leaders of the advisory board. And so Marian formed the "Outholders," and the little saying under it was "We Are More Than Them." [laughter]

Riess: When did Nat go on that board?

Owings: I don't know, I'd have to look that up. [Nat Owings on Secretary of the Interior's Advisory Board on National Parks, Historic Sites, Buildings and Monuments, Washington, D.C., 1966-1970, chairman, 1970-1972, member of the council 1972-1984.]

I speak of myself as if I were on the national parks advisory board. I felt I was because I went to so many meetings, and they were so nice to let me do that. I was a great friend of Stewart Udall [secretary of the interior under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson] who was working with them, and he came and stayed with us at the ranch. I worked with him personally on different things.

One night we were all piled into a cab, including Marian Heiskell. I was one of those who came with a husband. We piled into this cab, everyone on top of everyone else. We were being taken someplace for something at night. Marian said, "Oh, let us arrange it so that when we all die we'll have just one box. We'll have all of our ashes put together in that one box so that we can spend the rest of our time together." [laughs]

Loren Eiseley

Owings: There were a number of people of consequence I met through that national parks advisory board, including Loren Eiseley. I was a great, great admirer of Loren Eiseley's writing. I don't know how familiar you are with his writing.

Riess: A little. How would you characterize the kind of writing that he does?

Owings: Well, it's always anthropological.

Riess: It's mystical too, isn't it?

Owings: Very mystical, often dark. As a child he played in the sewers of the city with a little band of boys. His mother was a mute, and his father was away all the time, so he was brought up in a very difficult, unhappy, solitary kind of way. Everything was silent. That is when he found his voice through writing. He wrote the story of his life rather later, after he'd written other things. He will focus on a pebble in a stream and then go into it in all sorts of depths of analysis until your mind is just reeling with the breadth of the earth. He wrote such beautiful, beautiful things.

Riess: He was trained as an anthropologist?

Owings: He was trained as an anthropologist, and probably as a writer. He taught at the University of Pennsylvania.

He winds things together in such a beautiful way. The little chapter he wrote of finding some birds in an old cabin--he sees that one flies down and one flies up, and finally they join together--I read that at my husband's memorial service that I had here. I just loved what he wrote, some chapters more than others, but little tidbits of thoughts.

I must tell you this about Eiseley. Nat was invited down to Texas to speak about what was going to happen in the year 2000. (It seemed like a long ways off. Of course, we're rushing towards that pell-mell!) They were a lot of very grave people, most of them talking about technology of the future, you know, and the computer mind at work. That doesn't fit in with Nat's way of thinking in any way, and so he flowed in the way he flows in his conversation when he spoke to this rather learned, important group of people who were brought together.

Then Loren Eiseley got up. The first thing he told simply sent these people back in their seats. They couldn't <u>believe</u> what he was saying. He said he had watched a streetcar going down a street and watched the motorman suddenly put on the brake and the people all were jogged in the streetcar and the motorman opened the door, went out, and went ahead of the streetcar, and moved a grasshopper from the rail. [laughter] This is the kind of play thing, you see, that he does, and then he moves into the speech about the value of life, and the respect for life. They're often anecdotes that are extraordinary that he tells. I just thought you'd have to laugh about that! Of course, the great scholars said, "What is this man talking to us about?"

I was so pleased when he came here and he wanted to see what the little building was over the side of the cliff, my studio which I had down there. As usual, it was not in good order, but I took him down. He hadn't said very much. There were other people here. He tends to be quiet because he tends to write what he has to say, rather than speak what he has to say. I threw open the doors out onto the porch which looked down to the sea. (I can open up two doors that open up to the sea.) There was my desk, everything I had for drawings. I had a little wood stove and a little sink. I told him about how we could hear the whales breathing, the sound came up so closely. He said, "Oh!" I didn't know what that meant.

"I was happy," he said, "I just finished a study for myself where I was going to do my writing the rest of my life, in Pennsylvania. I just finished it, and now I have come out here and I have seen the place where I would like to do all of my writing."

That pleased me a lot, of course. I said, "You can come and write here anytime you wish." But other than small notes and seeing him in New York occasionally, that was my main connection with him.

Riess: Did you know him before you read his work?

Owings: No. That first book, <u>The Immense Journey</u>, I was very much intrigued by, and then I began to read every one that came along.

Riess: He has quite a vision, but very different from John Muir's. It's interesting that both of them inspired you.

Owings: Not all of Loren Eiseley's things inspire me. I think all of John Muir's did.

From the road near Lake Tenaya

Yosemite National Park

Illustrations for the John Muir book

Lyell Fork, Tuolumne River

John Muir

Riess: Didn't you read John Muir early, with the influence of your own father?

Owings: No. I just knew of John Muir, of course. My husband's father, who had died before I married Mac, had collected John Muir's books. So my husband brought them over. He wasn't as interested as I in them. I began to read them and I found the wonder of it, magnificent quotations that I could just sing.

I turned to it in a troubled time in my life. I was living in Chicago and not well, and had had various operations. I went into a deep depression. I went to Palm Springs to a very nice, simple ranch--really in the center of everything now that is pink and white, but there wasn't anything pink and white then. I began to read John Muir there. Really it became a religion with me. The Bible may help other people, but John Muir did it for me.

There are passages in his writings that are like anthems, and I understand he used to sit at his desk and pound out the lines with his fist as he wrote. He often read the Bible, and although the Bible doesn't really appear in any of his writing, something about it had caught into his soul, and he pounded out what he wrote in that biblical cadence. It's a rhythm with emphasis.

There's a lovely little book called Letters to a Friend. They were Muir's letters to a Mrs. Carr who really opened his eyes to the wonders of nature. She taught him to observe nature and to probe its depths. She was a woman older than he and had been his teacher in Wisconsin. They began a correspondence that was beautiful, and the letters from both sides have been saved, which has been nice. It was a delightful book because it was personal. You almost felt that he loved her, so you felt sort of a love, too, as he described the wonderful things that he wanted to show her. When she finally came to Yosemite, he was away at the time. She left a note for him by a bridge there near Vernal Falls.

When I was up in the High Sierras I began illustrating the running waters, and I climbed up the high passes and difficult places near the side-twisted junipers, and the red cedars, and I would sit and sketch. I used ink and a brush, I didn't use a pen or pencil, so that every line that came down was the final line. I had learned that from [Chiura] Obata. He taught me the freedom, at that point, of the line, and making it so much more alive. Later I've tried working with pen, or with--heaven forbid--these ball point pens, where the line's so dead that it loses all of its vitality.

As I was working on these paintings, I was thinking in terms of doing a book on John Muir, a book I would call "Sierra Anthems." Almost no new book had come out since a book by Linnie Marsh Wolfe, or since [William F.] Badè's writings, which are wonderful. Since then, of course, so many have come out, and Ansel Adams really awakened the world once again to John Muir. The book by Ansel with Ansel's photographs going along the Muir Trail, and with quotations selected by Nancy Newhall, was in the process of being done at that time, and I didn't know that.

I went to Macmillan in Boston, who was Muir's publisher, and took my work that I had done thus far, and they looked at it with great interest. They were very polite and nice about it, but they said, "Do you know what we're doing right this minute? We're working on this book by Ansel Adams with Nancy Newhall's selection of the lines from Muir's writings." And I thought I was all alone doing this! So I was discouraged, and set it aside.

I had about three or four shows in galleries of the work, and I sold a good many of them, and then I gave some away. So I have only a few left. I also gave them to David Brower, who put them up in his office in the Sierra Club for quite a while. Eventually, I gathered them up and brought them home again. [laughs] But that was part of my art, and its inspiration. [See facing page.]

Gavin Maxwell

Owings: I've been intrigued by Gavin Maxwell, not simply because he wrote Ring of Bright Water about otters, because I read that before I started Friends of the Sea Otter and before my sea otter interests really took such a hold of me, but it was his way of thinking. He was a very uneven man. He could have stupendously beautiful and deep passages, and then he would fade out and become weak. I mean, he'd watch an ant trying to walk up a blade of grass and failing and coming back and trying again and again. He would make out of that incident something that one can easily imagine had depth to it, a meaning for me and for anyone else.

But he became more somber as years passed and he left that lovely place of Camusfearna and went for a while to Iraq, where he lived among the reed people for a long time. And once again there he caught thoughts that were quite penetrating. I wrote a review of his last book in Defenders of Wildlife. There the whole world looked very, very dark to him, and I felt very sorry for him.

Riess: And that is what you call "weak," when he becomes dark?

Owings: Not necessarily, but he fades and he can't return in his writing. He became a mystic in his last books, and a very isolated, solitary person, except for his otters. In the end of the book he became afraid of his otters, which I felt was the denouement. It was all over at that point.

Riess: That's interesting. If we agree that Eiseley too was a mystic, did it all get to be too much for Eiseley also?

Owings: No, because Eiseley had, I think, within himself a strong character.

Peter Matthiessen

Owings: Peter Matthiessen. Have you read Peter Matthiessen?

Riess: Yes. At Play in the Fields of the Lord was the one I liked, though. I haven't read his nature writings.

Owings: Well, I had Wendy Morgan, who's so active in Planned Parenthood, here for several days recently. She was a great friend of Peter Matthiesen, and she found this in my library, The Cloud Forest. I had been talking about urging her to go down the Colorado, although I realized everything was different now than at an early time when Nat and I went down with Martin Litton in the dories. Nevertheless, she said, "Oh, what Peter Matthiessen went through when he went through rapids!" This was in Peru.

Peter Matthiessen does something that certainly no other scientist, and even few nature writers do. He himself is there. If he goes down into a particular crater--not the Ngoro Ngoro crater but another one that we went to the edge of--he goes down with great trepidation, looking on both sides, and his mind going a mile a minute thinking of the things that might happen. Here might be an elephant or here might be lions. In that way he went down this stream describing these waves and the rocks, and it was an incredibly beautiful book. We read probably a third of the book.

Then he does things like this lovely, lovely passage that I came across. It was published in The New Yorker and it was called "The Wind Birds."

> [reading] The restlessness of shore birds, their kinship with distance in the swift seasons, the wistful signal of their voices down the long coastlines of the world make them, for me, the most affecting of wild creatures. I think of them as birds of wind, as "wind birds."

Isn't that lovely?

Riess: Yes.

Owings: You find those passages quite often in his writing.

Riess: Do you think people come back from these experiences in nature and they've forgotten how it frightened them, or how it really felt?

Owings: Well, a man is a man and he has to have that sort of macho thing. Not Peter Matthiessen. I've read some of Peter Matthiessen I didn't like at all, but other times I've been much charmed because he sort of let me in, and you could walk down through the trees into these places that are within. Exactly the way I felt when I wrote that little article called "The Nerve Song." Africa was a nerve song, for me.

Archibald MacLeish

Owings: Archibald MacLeish meant a great deal to me in his poetry and his expressions. I'm sure you're familiar with the lines he wrote after our astronauts had gotten up into space and looked at the earth as a whole, looked at the earth as a little planet, and suddenly saw it as it was.

> [reading] To see the earth as it truly is, small and blue and beautiful, in the eternal silence where it floats, is to see ourselves as riders on the earth together, brothers on that bright loveliness, in the eternal cold, brothers who now know they are truly brothers.

If only the thoughts and philosophy behind that could be remembered today. That was twenty years ago he wrote that.

Nat and I went sailing with the Rockefellers, Laurance and Mary and David and Peggy. We visited the MacLeishes in the West Indies. At one point he picked up a shell, a conch shell. We walked down to the edge of the water--I wrote this up in one of my

Otter Rafts--and he raised it to his lips and blew. Let me find what I wrote about it. [brief tape interruption]

> [reading] Twenty years ago I had the privilege of standing beside Archibald MacLeish on the rocky margin of the sea beside his home on the island of Antigua. He was holding in his hand a large conch shell, and facing the incoming tide he raised it to his lips and blew. At first the sound was the softness of the wind, then it became a muffled voice, speaking out, gaining strength and breadth, reaching to great distances. When he lowered the shell a moment it became a listening point at the magical edge of the shoreline.

We had a lovely time with the MacLeishes; she was lovely and their house was lovely and they gave us a lovely lunch.

Riess: I like those lines from MacLeish, the all-oneness.

Owings: Yes, and that we're brothers, we should be brothers. Just before he died Adlai Stevenson wrote a magnificent passage about that, our spaceship. I don't know whether you're familiar with it. I have that.

Rainer Maria Rilke

Owings: The other writer who meant a great deal to me was Rainer Maria Rilke. Nat and I read his letters aloud. They were letters from 1892 to 1910, and then other letters published 1910-1926. He was an extraordinary mind and a beautiful mind and a poetic mind and a sad mind and a philosophic mind. He wrote something about the nightingales passing through his room in the dark and their songs. Of course, that's just one little vignette of what he wrote. I long ago decided that if I were put on an island and had only one book, I would take Rilke. That's the book I would want to take.

Riess: If you were to find an equivalent of the Bible, like Muir had been, could it be Rilke?

Owings: No, that's different. It's deeply analytical but wonderful word pictures. Just like Proust. He has these wonderful word pictures. He was a solitary man, and I always appreciate solitary people. He had to flee from one place to another. After working for a year, writing, he would then have to pack his bag and go

out, as he used to say, "for new freedoms," which of course very shortly caught him down again.

Marcel Proust

Owings: Proust--Nat and I are probably some of the few people who've read all of Proust at least three times, and when we did, it's been over a number of years. We read it in the evening. Sometimes I'd have a period of reading and sometimes Nat would have a period of reading. Then we'd talk about it. Then we'd look back and try to find those passages.

It was the way he expressed himself and this extraordinary mind and this strange little creature. His perversions weren't of interest to us, but his observations were of intense interest to us.

Riess: When you say "complete," you really mean all five volumes?

Owings: Yes, we read the whole thing. In "Nerve Song" I likened the giraffes to the Duchess of Guermantes. They were so incredibly royal, really, in the way they moved their legs and their necks and their high heads and that sort of crest on top of their heads. Shall I read the passage in Proust?

Riess: Yes, do.

Owings: The Duchess of Guermantes really haunted Proust. Continually he was going back to her and thinking about her and trying to understand her.

> [reading] I felt the mystery but could not solve the riddle of that smiling gaze which she addressed to her friends in azure brilliance with which it glowed while she surrendered her hand to one and then to another, a gaze which, could I have broken up its prism, analyzed its crystallization, might perhaps have revealed to me the essential quality of the unknown form of life which became apparent in it at that moment.

If you haven't read Proust, it's an experience, but it's ideal to do it with someone else so you can talk about it. When we traveled we always had a Proust book with us, and if we were in a hotel or whatever we'd read it for a little while before we'd turn out the lights.

Riess: Proust is the great unreadable. I mean, why did you set yourself that particular challenge?

Owings: Oh, it wasn't a challenge at all after we began it. No, we loved it.

We would meet people and find they read Proust, and they would speak of the three trees and we'd know exactly what they meant. We grew to know it so that we could mentally go back to it, and then of course had the pleasure of rereading it.

Riess: Did you make marks in the books, or do you not make marks in books?

Owings: I rarely made marks in Proust, but I have gone through books and made lots of marks. Well, Proust was total worlds apart.

Riess: That is one aspect of it. Escape is what a lot of reading is.

Owings: Yes, it was just moving into another world. Someone has sent me recently, because I'm having trouble reading, tapes of books, and I have half a mind to do it again, order Proust and lie on the couch at night just the way I used to and listen to this voice reading it! It's slipping into sort of a hammock of wonderfulness.

All right, that was that.

Robinson and Una Jeffers

Owings: Robinson Jeffers, of course, meant everything. I met him several times. When Dylan Thomas came here, I introduced them.

When we'd finished saving the San Jose Creek Beach and the beaches along to the south, which we'll speak about later here, when we finished that, then we thought we wanted to save more of the immediate coastline. We thought of the idea of purchasing the land that belonged to the Jefferses. From their house, the stone house, down to the water's edge, which Scenic Drive passed through, was theirs. We were afraid it would be built upon, which of course it was, subsequently.

Una was ill and in bed, and she sent Robinson Jeffers over to the board of supervisors to speak against this purchase, which was a great pity--because much was lost. He'd never gone to a board

of supervisors meeting, and it was very difficult for him to do it, but he did it for her. And because of that statement they agreed to not follow through on this. A great pity.

She wrote a message at the time, on the back of an envelope, and she sent it over to me. This is what she wrote:

> [reading] Our deed to the cliff has a proviso that the pedestrian public should be allowed on our beach to fish, picnic, et cetera. We have <u>never</u> tried to prevent the public doing this. But taking advantage of the word 'pedestrian,' we have insisted that motorists must leave their cars on the side streets by our property and walk down to the shore. Thus, we have kept the entire cliff free of cars parking cheek to jowl all along the seafront and destroying the beauty of the scene. Our deed also stipulated that we erect no building of any kind down there, and we have kept this beach clean for thirty years. What more do these public-spirited people want? Not the filth on the Carmel beach.

But, you see, think of what's happened instead, and it would have just remained the same if that hadn't occurred. I thought that I'd put that little note in a frame because it's part of the history of the shoreline there along Scenic Drive.

Riess: And there was no arguing with her?

Owings: She was adamant, but I think in great part because she was a dying woman and felt that it would be taken from them. Actually, it would have been saved for them, but that's the way it worked out.

<u>Judith Anderson</u>

Owings: I loved Robinson Jeffers, and I took a course at the University of California one summer just on Robinson Jeffers given by a man named [Benjamin] Lehman who was a great friend of Judith Anderson.

Riess: He married her.

Owings: I'd forgotten that he married her. Did you ever do an oral history on Judith Anderson?

Riess: No, but I did on Benjamin Lehman.[1]

Owings: Judith Anderson came to the house here a number of times. One time, it was winter and the fire was going. She was sitting on the couch there and I came into the room. I had on a long, full, red wool dress, and I didn't have the grey hair I now have, and my hair was pulled back.

She watched me come in. I said something, I had some message I wanted to give, and I just gave it in sort of a calm way, you see, hands at my sides. She jumped up and she said, "That isn't the way to come in and give those words!" She stood up and she raised her hand and she said, "Now you say--" whatever it was I said. I've always remembered that. Sometimes I try to do it, too.

Laurens van der Post

Owings: Laurens van der Post. Did I speak about him? He's one that made a great difference to me. That first book that came to my attention, and maybe it was his first book, was Venture to the Interior.

Riess: About Africa?

Owings: About Africa. I read it aloud to Jim. [Jim Brett was the caretaker who lived in a separate house on the Owings property.] I wanted to attract Jim's attention to things other than sports, so in the evening I started a reading time. He was intrigued, but ready to be critical, in a way. But I loved it, and in reading it again I found why I had loved it before. Anyway, his descriptions, again, and the meanings behind things.

Riess: He's an analyst, isn't he?

Owings: Yes, he'd worked with Jung, and therefore that sort of creeps into things. He was a friend of my friend Maude Oakes, who lived up here on Partington Ridge. I believe he came and stayed with her. I never had the opportunity to meet him. He wrote Seed and the Sower and the book on the Kalahari, the bushmen, and The Sword and

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[1]Benjamin H. Lehman, Recollections and Reminiscences of Life in the Bay Area from 1920 Onward, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1969, 348 pp.

the Doll, which was a book of his prison experience under the Japanese, of forgiving.

He talked about when--and I often speak to people about this --when you have something that bothers you a great deal or it makes you very angry or you can't let it go, he'd say, "Go into your garden, into the corner of your garden, and dig a hole and place it there and put the sod over it and come back and leave it alone." He said it, of course, much better than that, but it was to not dwell on the agonies that you've gone through in life, as he went through in the prison camp under the Japanese, which were incredible, of course, just incredible.

Rachel Carson

Owings: Rachel Carson was the other one who became something like a religion to me.[1] I read The Sea Around Us at a time when I was having a troubled time myself, a deeply troubled time, and oh, it was marvelous! The beautiful style in which she presented it, which has been imitated now quite often by other people but never to equal the way she unrolled it. It's always the big view spotted with details, but a big, wonderful view, and the idea of "this moment of time that is ours" that she repeated again and again. "This moment of time that was mine." It's a very arresting thought, and it sets a goal. In a way it sets a goal for accomplishment during a very brief period. I thought I'd have that on my stone down there on the point with Nat's.

Riess: What does Nat's say?

Owings: Nat's is perfect for him, just perfect. Before Nat died he said, "If I have an epitaph, this is what I'd like to have it say." We had talked about having our ashes down on that point. [looking through materials] Here it is: "Instinct untrammeled, joyous and fearless." He did so much by instinct and hated to have it held back. He wanted to be joyous, and he was not afraid, and he plunged ahead in spite of many things sometimes. So it was perfect for him.

Riess: It was a quote from something?

Owings: I think he used it when he accepted the AIA gold medal. I think it was in that, but that's it.

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[1]See Chapter IX

Margaret's Notebooks

Riess: [referring to materials in front of Owings] You have to tell me what these little books represent.

Owings: These are my notebooks. This is a book I've kept for forty years. I copy down lines that I think are magnificent or deep in their meaning.

I'm going to do something that doesn't fit in with your tape at all! This goes back to Gavin Maxwell. It was in "Raven Seek Thy Brother." It was a description of the eider calling.

> [reading] The mating call uttered as the drake flings his splendid head far back on his shoulders is a woodwind sound, something between the lowest note of a flute and the highest of an oboe, a serenade so sweet and pure that it seems to become a part of the smooth blue sea and the small, jeweled tumble of wavelets upon white sand under a summer sky.

Isn't that something?

Riess: Yes.

Owings: There's another line from him that I have quoted a number of times in my Otter Raft because it relates to human beings' relationships with wildlife and wild animals.

> [reading] The way back cannot be the same for all of us, but for those like myself it means a descent of the rungs until we stand again amid the creatures of the earth and share to some small extent their vision of it.

Riess: I know that passage from your writing. It's so contradictory to man's usual aspirations.

Owings: Yes, going down the ladder.

Riess: How do you locate passages in the notebooks? Alphabetically?

Owings: Someday I'm going to organize something that resembles the alphabet, perhaps.

Riess: This would be a book of favorite things.

Owings: Oh, deeper than "favorite things," things that say something, to me. And beautiful things. I love the power of beautiful expression. I love to read it, and when I find it it gives me great pleasure.

The choicest bits I've ever jotted down in notebooks have been what I observed as I walked along or drove along, or I was on a hike and sat down on a rock and jotted down the moment, the absolute moment of hearing this birdsong or watching an incident happen.

Laurance Rockefeller, whom I knew quite well for many years, always carried this poem in his top pocket. It's called "Opportunity,"

> [reading] They do me wrong who say I come no more,/ When once I knock and fail to find you in./ For every day I stand outside your door,/ And bid you wake and rise to fight and win./ Wail not for precious chances passed away,/ Weep not for golden ages on the wane./ Each night I burn the records of the day./ At sunrise every soul is born again.

You know, all the Rockefellers had such a load of criticism coming at them all the time. Doing the best they could, and then being damned about all kinds of things. "Each night I burn the records of the day. At sunrise every soul is born again."

Things like that help me. There are a lot of things in these notebooks that help personally, but might help other people.

Riess: That's probably the power of poetry, the unforgettable image.

Owings: Yes, I think that's so, I think that's a good way to put it, the power of poetry or poetic expression, or just a well-phrased sentence, the image that it brings. It often can be almost in the abstract.

Riess: Nice. I wonder if everyone has little talismans or whatever that they walk around with. I have old cookie fortunes to cheer me on.

Owings: Every once in a while I receive a letter--I received one the other day from this friend Wendy Morgan who means so much to me. She was visiting and after she left I found a letter downstairs on her pillow. It's the kind of letter, you know, when things go wrong or I'm down or disturbed, I can just pick it up and read that letter. It was that she had the power in it too, and the beautiful way of expressing it that was very, very nice.

IV NATHANIEL ALEXANDER OWINGS

Riess: Has there ever been an oral history done with your late husband Nathaniel Owings? [Owings died in 1984.]

Owings: Not that I know of. I mean, people were always coming here and putting tape recorders down and he talked into them about everything under the sun.

He had a way of talking. He used figures of speech with great strength. Sometimes his sister would say to me, "You know, I heard Nat talk the other night at that meeting, and I just thought it was great. And yet when I came home I couldn't really grasp a thing that he'd said." [laughing]

He gave one talk about the dynamo and the Virgin. He was a great admirer of Henry Adams. He did this in Chicago--at the Commercial Club, I guess. Anyway, for the big businessmen. He was really treading on their toes and just going his own way. I heard it on tape later, and I realized that it was a great speech and one that few people, few men, would ever be able to give. That was his greatest quality.

He always got the audience with him when he talked, right off the bat. He always had something amusing that he just thought of when he stepped up there. Like that business of having my grocery list in his pocket and reading it. Then he had the audience and then they started to listen to him, you know, and thought, "My God, who is this man anyway? What's he talking about?"

Sometimes I wrote his speeches for him, because he was an alcoholic. (We went through all that and he completely conquered it, absolutely--well, you don't, as they say, ever conquer it, but he never slipped again, ever.) But he was going through a bad alcoholic period, and he had to have fourteen lectures for Schloss Leopoldskrone in Salzburg, and I saw he couldn't do it. I spent the whole summer writing here. But he wasn't himself, you know? I tried to think of writing it in a way that he might say it, but I didn't because it wasn't him.

Riess: I want to devote some time to talking about Nat. Why don't we do it here, now.

Owings: All right. Mind you, it is something I will want to go over quite carefully, because I won't want to say the wrong thing about him. Shall we begin?

Riess: Yes. Where did you meet him?

Owings: I met Nat out in New Mexico at Jacona, where he had a small ranch. He was there very little, although he loved it, and he had a wife and four children out there. They touched base so rarely that they were about to get a divorce. (I don't know anything about that.)

I was invited over to their house for his birthday; he came out there for his birthday, which was February 4. I was out there because I had just had a divorce. I was staying in a marvelous little adobe guest house of a woman to whom I had been introduced, and I had my little girl Wendy with me.

I went over there that day, and there was Nat. Nat threw open the door--I can see him to this day, with a white shirt on--and he welcomed me so fully. Just an open-armed welcome. I stepped into the room filled with people, none of whom I knew. There was sort of an air of chicness to the different foreign cars, racing cars and things parked outside, and I thought, "Uh-oh. This isn't my dish of tea." But anyway, I went in.

And he instantly took a shine to me, which I was instantly aware of. But I went around and talked with different people. Some of them talked about new diamond earrings they had, and things of that sort. I was living on the mud floors of this little adobe hut up in Nambe. Everything had become quite simple for me, and I wanted it simple. But it was another kind of level, the friends that were there. His former wife was also there, and I liked her.

At any rate, when Nat makes a decision about a person, he sure makes it. And he made it instantly about me. Not that I knew that necessarily, but he went out of his way then to stay over. We found our two daughters were going to the same tutor up the valley, so he took his daughter Kim to tutoring and came and got her so that he could see me come and get Wendy. Always this pink and smiling face.

He <u>immediately</u> did for me what I've watched him do for other people too: he built me up. He had the ability of either--if he

doesn't really respond to a person, or like them, he can just push them away and say a very sharp word that is painful to them. I watched it happen during our marriage, and it always pained me a great deal. But when he feels differently, as he did towards me, it was to build me up, instantly to start building me up.

I had had a marriage in which I was put down so completely that I'd sort of snuck around a little, with not too much self esteem. I was clinging to my art work, and working on that. It was a period of adjustment for me, out there.

At any rate, Nat moved very rapidly. When he was in Chicago he would call me. He was always sending me flowers or doing all kinds of things that people didn't do way out in the country. You can't send flowers out in the country, you know, without great difficulty. [laughing] The minute he'd arrive he'd be over with a gift for me, and he'd take me out to dinner. The first gift he brought me was some heishi from the Hopis.

He spoke about how the Spanish, if you admired something in their house, they'd always walk right over, take it off the wall, and give it to you. He felt that way about me: he wanted to give me anything I admired or happened to speak about.

That was the beginning of my relationship with Nat. I found him a man who was so opposite from my former husband that I thought, "My god, what am I getting into?"

Then after a while I left because it was getting too much. I had rented my house in the Carmel Highlands, so I came down to Big Sur to live. When I was away from him I'd think, "No, I cannot marry this man. I can't marry this man. No, he's completely apart from anything I know." His whole experience of everything --if you want a thing, you just go after it. I wasn't at that stage right then, although I'd had periods in my life when I went at things with some vigor. But I'd been held back, like a big heavy cloak put over my shoulders, and he threw that cloak off. He built me up, which was marvelous.

That is really why I married him: he made me into a person again. I mean, he outdid himself all the years he was married to me. I came first. Anything I ever asked for or thought about or even mentioned, he would just stop everything to do it for me. I don't think he was necessarily interested in wildlife but he <u>certainly became interested</u> before we were through [laughs], very much interested.

One time I took him for a walk up the Nissen path in Grimes Canyon. He wanted to please me very much, and he said, "You know,

I love nature." And I laughed and laughed and laughed. That was the beginning of it, his "love for nature." [laughter]

He was a little astonished--he'd never been astonished at anything--at the cliffs here, and the heights. He came out to see me--this was when I'd sort of agreed to marry him, but kept drawing back--I brought him down here in the fall and we had some champagne and peaches out there on that point. It was just a sort of goat path coming down, and very precipitous, and we sat under the bay trees that are still there.

I told him this was where I'd like to live. He was a man who was nearly always on the go, always in a plane, always going from New York to Chicago to San Francisco to Portland to Los Angeles to Europe for something. He was always going to meetings. And here I was, this woman quietly sitting on this point of land in this remote place of Big Sur where the road wasn't paved or anything then. It took quite a bit of time to get down here, not like it is today. [laughs a little] There was a hesitant moment, as he looked down the steep cliffs, but he didn't hesitate long. "By golly," he said, "let's do it." So then we were married [December 30, 1953].

The woman who owned this, Mrs. Whiteside, said she didn't want to sell it because she was writing a book. We asked her what the book was about, and she said it was about the Bible--she had already read one thousand books, she told us--and when it was through it would be made into a movie, and she would have a great deal of money, and then she would build a house on this property. Nat said laughingly to her, "If it's going to take you nine years to get the book through, why don't you rent this land to us and we'll live on it, and after we die you can just have it with the house and everything." She looked up at him and said, "You think I'm joking, don't you?"

Well, we were married and we went off to Europe, and it was in Rome that we had a cable--Nat left a stringer out with a lawyer in town and told Mrs. Whiteside to get in touch with him, that he would give her cash for the property if she really needed it. She needed the cash, and so suddenly we got a cable that it was ours. It said, "There are forty acres."

We looked at one another and said, "Where would forty acres be?" [laughs] It was just a thin point of land dropping down to the sea. Of course, because of the way the lines are drawn it stretches way over to include the sea lion beach to the south. And it stretched to the stream to the north. Later we bought the rest of it.

Owings house, Big Sur, interior.

Photograph by Ezra Stolle

We came home to view our property. It was a big thing, beginning to build and plan. We had our first disagreement over it. Nat thought of a glass house kind of thing, and I thought of something that was hidden and part of the environment as much as possible. That's why we chose redwood and stone.

He took great pleasure in it, but he had to do a switcharound because we weren't Mies van der Rohe building a place on this point of land by any manner or means. [laughing] And besides, if you're going to live in Big Sur on the coast you can't live in an open house. You can't live through glass. You have to have shadow and you have to have closed areas and you have to move from one area to the other. You can't look straight to the west, to the afternoon sun. So we adjusted to all those things.

Mark Mills, a young man who had worked with Frank Lloyd Wright, moved in and helped us and drew up things. He was the one who introduced those big timbers to the south there that are bridge timbers from an old bridge we found. He did much of it. Nat can't ever work with anyone for very long because he wants to assert himself, so there was a little friction there which I watched happen. It didn't need to have happened, but it happened, and Nat and I finished the details, completed the house.

Riess: You two figured out a way to design together?

Owings: Yes, after that. And we did everything on the Jacona ranch together. Absolutely. I drew the plans up. I drew it always in perspective, because that's the only way I could imagine the thing. I had to draw it in perspective rather than looking at it in a blueprint, which seemed so foolish to me. [laughs] So, that was that.

Over the years, Nat gave me the strength. First there was the mountain lion bounty. The lion was on this property, and we were aware of it for quite some time. And then it was killed and a bounty was awarded for it. I just jumped in. I was going to do something. I'd never been to Sacramento, I'd never done anything with senators or anything.

Nat was always there, steady, steady, building me up. Standing behind me. In my strong moments he would pick up those strong moments, and then make something of them. Push me into doing it. In the past I would have these strong moments and then I would start to analyze them down to the quick. And they sometimes vanished, or I withdrew from them, because they were bigger than myself. He got me into doing things much bigger than myself.

I'm talking about all this relating to myself, but I watched the same thing in Nat's dealing with other people, some of whom he made what they were. He made them what they were. Others he hurt, and that was unfortunate. He was quick in the tongue, and also a joke could have a very stinging sharp thing behind it that hurt. And those people, if they were here at the house talking or something, and they left, they took it with them. Nat was already off laughing at the clouds or something, without realizing the pain he had caused.

Riess: Did you end up patching things up a lot?

Owings: [slowly] I tried to, but I couldn't do it very much. I tried to, though. I tried to get him to change, and in some ways I did have him change. But he still had some of that left, up to the last years of his life, when he mellowed. By the time he had that [A.I.A.] gold medal given to him he was very mellow indeed [1983].

That was a joy, but it was followed very soon after by his death. He was very dear and mellow and loving towards the world during those last months of his life, and he saw things in a different way. He looked forward to death, because he looked forward to having his ashes down on the point. We talked together about where I would put his ashes, and that's when he suggested that line for his epitaph: "Instinct untrammeled, joyous and fearless."

I found a stone down there at the point, and David Childs, a young partner in Skidmore, Owings, Merrill, offered to engage a craftsman to carve the words. They were most difficult to chip out in a very rough rock, so it looks rather childish, but it was done by a great craftsman. [laughs gently] He suffered from it.

I chose a rock near his on which I am having a few words carved for myself. I'd like us to end down there and not be noticeable. People can go on living on this point and not even know we're there. But it's a beautiful place to be.

Last night, for example, the sun was so magnificent, the sunset. The sky had a glow to it, and the horizon had a glow to it, and then it became grey. Then suddenly radiation began to rise from the horizon, and a magnificent sunset, with a ceiling across of buffy clouds reflecting pink on the Lucia Mountains up here at the top of Grimes Creek. Like the Sangre de Cristo mountains in New Mexico that reflect the sunset.

Riess: Do you go out and look at it every night, the sunset?

Owings: Yes. Jim calls me and says, "Have you looked at the sunset yet?" So then I put everything down and rush out to look at the sunset.

Riess: Was Nat self-critical, in the way he was with other people?

Owings: No one has ever asked me that question. [pauses, considering] Yes, he was self-critical in his biggest weakness, which he conquered, and that was alcohol. He became very self-critical about that, and began to wonder what damage he had done when he was drinking, saying things that he wouldn't even recall that he'd said, or who he'd said them to. He began to worry about that, and he began to develop--as with Alcoholics Anonymous, they develop a certain humility, and a spiritual attitude.

I used to tell him what he really should have been is a monk. Of course, if I say that in front of other people they just laugh and laugh, they can't imagine Nat as a monk; they'd think he would be exactly the opposite. He would love to have been around in the brown robes, and the cloths around his neck, and ringing the bells. But he would have to initiate new things into old patterns, and that would be very difficult for the missions to accept.

Religion meant a great deal to him, although he was brought up a Unitarian, as was I. It's interesting that we both came from that same background. Both of us also enjoy the pageantry and the emotional meaning of the Catholic church which we witnessed so much, first in Rome when we were there for six months. Then we witnessed it a great deal out in New Mexico where we started to renovate the old adobe missions there, re-adobeing them, not putting plaster on, getting everything down to bare bones again. Nat became a great friend of the archbishop, who came and blessed our house, and he had wonderful exchanges with him.

Riess: What do you think Nat liked most about architecture?

Owings: I think that his interest in architecture began not when he was a young boy in Indianapolis. He lived a very simple life in a simple quarter of the city, and his father had died and his mother had the burden of the two children. She worked in a bookstore. He had very little opportunity to even be presented with the history of architecture or art. But when he was chosen as one of the two students from Indiana by the Boy Scouts for their first Scout Jamboree--they were eagle scouts they were selected from--they were taken to London and Paris and then, because it was right after the war, to Verdun, the fields there. That war thing made a deep impression upon him, as it had me--I went there very shortly afterwards.

The cathedrals just were the greatest thing of his life, entering a cathedral and suddenly feeling the height. He has always had a great sense of space, which sounds like a funny thing to say. The relation of spaces to spaces, and heights to widths. He has that much more than many architects who aren't even aware of it. They figure something out mathematically, but they don't sense the psychological sensation of space and what it does to people. He was very much interested in the effect of the entrance to a building, what psychological and, in churches, what spiritual feeling one would have when entering.

Riess: The entrance to this house is very narrow and dark.

Owings: Yes, it is. Almost too dark. That's why I tripped over Muffet in the entrance the other day and fell down. [laughing]

Riess: That's a very deliberate feeling that has been created.

Owings: Yes, and then you come out into the open. We have been pleased with the proportions of this room, living in it. It has always given us a good feeling coming into it, and living in it.

Riess: Do you think that he was looking for a great change in his life also, and that's why it worked so well to move to Big Sur?

Owings: It made a great change in his life. I don't think he realized it was going to make such a great change.

In the beginning he was still trying to run everything at once. He had great vitality. He would leave the house by six in the morning to get the earliest plane up to San Francisco, and get there before anyone had even opened the office. He'd have his breakfast up there, and then come back for dinner. It's a thing that not many people did. Sometimes he even did that when we were living in New Mexico. He would fly to Chicago or something like that, just to a meeting, and he'd fly back so he would be back for dinner. That was the way he operated.

He was also a man who I always felt had a suitcase ready--although he never packed much, he'd just throw some things into a bag and go off--whereas I would take two days advance thinking if I was going anyplace of note.

He never gave a thought to drawbacks of finances or anything. He just moved out into things without any analysis of money. I say that, bringing in that point, because that's the way he was with many things.

I remember the time we talked with David Rockefeller about Chase Manhattan Bank, and immediately Nat wanted the property beside it. It was big enough down there on Wall Street as it was, you know. It was a mammoth investment for a place. David and the board thought they wanted to move further north, and Nat wanted them to stay down there and really have an open space, really have a big plaza and space where air could come down, and sunshine. That was his theme there, which worked out very well. It also changed the attitude and the minds of other architects who were leaving a dark area to go up north and make that gradually into an area of solid glass.

Riess: In his book he makes it clear that it was a great source of amusement and pleasure to him to be invited to the right clubs and to be with the right people.[1]

Owings: Yes, that's right. It was. A lot of that came out of the simplicity of his childhood. It was something I watched, and naturally took part in when I was with him. But it has never been my way. I would sort of bring him back to homespun kinds of things.

But we had lots of interesting friends who grew out of these associations, and it certainly brought into my life a vast group of friends who, whether they were leaders in politics or business or whatever, they enriched my life, too. Although I tended towards simplicity. I liked artists and musicians and poets and that kind of thing.

Riess: And he knew that about you when he married you. Did you have to keep asserting that?

Owings: No, except that he didn't quite give me time to do the things that I wanted to do, in the beginning. At that point I wanted to do quite a bit of art work. I worked out these methods of being able to travel with him and have my boards all prepared for this crayon kind of thing. I couldn't have paints very well in my bag. I would rush out and do shows of Turkey, and shows of the Greek Islands, and shows of Rome, and then the Southwest.

Riess: What did you do with all those children?

Owings: You are asking what I did when we were all out in New Mexico, I assume.

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[1]The Spaces Inbetween: An Architect's Journey (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1973).

I had my daughter, Wendy, and when I married into Nat's family, Wendy found herself living with the Owings children. Wendy was a year younger than Nat's twins, Kim and Natalie, and Jennifer was younger than Wendy, and the youngest child was a little boy named Nat. Before I married Nat, Wendy had met Kim at that tutor's house in Pojoaque. Otherwise, she was not too familiar with the other children. Even though there was a swimming pool and horses, etc. it was a hard adjustment for Wendy.

Nat and Emily had brought up the children totally differently than I had thought of bringing up children. In New Mexico they had built a children's house where they slept, and a living room for them, and another house where they ate, and where there was a cook living, and someone to watch over the kids. All these were quite distant, so they had to have telephones. There was all this telephone service between the places. That was not quite the way I imagined a family living.

Riess: Was this a theory of child raising?

Owings: Yes, it was a theory I suppose. It wasn't necessarily a wise one. When there was a birthday they'd be together, or Christmas, Thanksgiving or Easter, events like that, they would all come over and eat at the parents' house. Emily loved to give parties, but the regular living was far from togetherness.

Riess: That's extraordinary!

Owings: Oh, it was! So when I came along, of course, I tried to change everything. First, we all ate meals together, and I brought a cook, Julia, to the ranch for two summers. So I had help..

Then, I started art classes, and I started reading aloud in the evenings, or Nat would read aloud a book that we were working on. I got lots of art materials so they could come in and work over at the main house complex.

Jenny was the one who carried it through with the most earnestness, and she's been exceedingly successful in art. I started her with just black ink and brush, and in a way that has been her main style and technique ever since, in most of the illustrations that she has done that have been published in many books. Although now she works quite a bit with pencil. But she was a child with a rag doll which she talked to all the time and carried with her all the time. She always felt left out because the twins were a little older and together, and Jenny was younger, and Wendy was in between them all. Young Nat was dancing around happily.

It was hard, in a way, for Wendy. Although she longed to be at the Owings children's house when we were living in our remote little adobe guest house which was only about four miles away, when she suddenly found herself living there she felt left out, you know. So she went through an unhappy period.

But then we started sending the children off to schools. Summers we had horses for everyone, and we got them trained so they could go to horse shows of an informal nature. Nat first had pigs, but after I'd been there a while we used the pig troughs for planting. Moved them up and planted petunias in them. [laughter]

Riess: What was the idea of the pigs?

Owings: I don't know. I don't know. He wanted to run it like a ranch, but after that he lost interest in it. The ranch foreman left, and never returned. We had a Spanish-American by the name of Leo who was on the place all the time. Leo helped us build our own house and was great handling the adobe bricks. He built the walls so high--they went up and up until someone shouted, "Stop!"

But let me speak of the twins, for a moment, before we go on.

Riess: Yes.

Owings: Natalie married John Fell Stevenson, son of Adlai Stevenson. They were married here at our house in Big Sur on a day following a tremendous rain storm. The road men had to clear the rocks and slides off the coast road because so many people of "importance" came to the wedding and reception following, at Nepenthe. Adlai and his friends and the governor and a host of people and the press.

Because the press came en masse, we had Howard Welch, our garbage man, up at the gate holding them back, but telling them anecdotes about the family that hit the Examiner and the L.A. Times in graphic forms.

Riess: Well, that must have been interesting to read!

Owings: Yes, it covered news sheets for days.

But it was a very pretty wedding right out there on the terrace. The guests I served before the wedding included members of the Stevenson and the Owings families who hadn't spoken to one another for years.

Natalie and John Fell had three handsome children, John Fell, Jr., Alexander, and Andrea. The marriage, alas, ended in divorce,

which troubled Nat and me a great deal. Alexander tragically died of cancer when he was attending Cate School.

Riess: What about the other twin?

Owings: Kim's life became her children, Anya, Jasmine, Sacha and Jesse, all beautiful children. She was married to Sigurd Kaposi in Wolfsberg, Austria, but couldn't seem to swing it away from Marin County, California, and therefore the marriage dissolved. Nat and I were distressed about this, for we liked Sigurd immensely.

Riess: You've told me about Nat's daughters. What about young Nat?

Owings: Young Nat was a very normal little boy. Actually, he just seemed to carry love in his heart for everyone. He loved me and I loved him. As he grew older, he went to college at Fort Collins, and because he had a small stutter, he began meeting with a professor of speech disorders, so he could understand his own problem. After graduation in 1968, he married Cindy Hagen who had become an expert weaver. She helped support him through her weaving as he was getting his Ph.D. at the University of Wisconsin at Madison. His Ph.D. was in "Communicative Disorders." They lived in Bozeman, Montana. He became an expert in child language disorders.

Riess: Did that marriage work out?

Owings: Nat's nature was to be possessive, and after their daughter Maya was born, Nat adored her and seemed to own her more than Cindy. Cindy, alas, left him, and they were divorced. That was hard for him, but he learned something out of it. Before long, in 1981, he met Page Allen, a painter and a charming young woman. They married, and Page was very dear with Maya.

Now Nat runs an art gallery in Santa Fe, very high quality work! And Page's paintings are an important part of his shows. He shows O'Keeffe and John Marin and many well known painters.

Riess: This house [in Big Sur] was built in 1957, is that right?

Owings: No, we moved in in 1957.

Riess: And you were married in 1953?

Owings: Yes. When I first married Nat he had a house in Chicago on State Street. He took me to it and I almost fainted. It was one of the old, historical town houses, with long, narrow stairways going up and up. We were there only a short time.

We had an apartment in San Francisco up at the top of Union Street, at Alta Street, and that was a delight. I did the interior with Japanese Shoji screens. I had always liked oriental things, and a number of the art forms I had were mostly Japanese or Chinese.

The day that we finally completed it I said to Nat, "Now, we've completed this." He said, "All right, that's good, let's move." And so literally that happened. We had started building the Big Sur place, and I had the house in the Carmel Highlands, the stone house. So we moved between the ranch, the stone house in the Highlands, and building this.

Riess: Why was he ready to leave San Francisco?

Owings: I don't know why. There's much that he enjoyed. It was a great walk for him down to the office, going along Grant Avenue. The oriental stone figure that we now have down here along the path was one that he passed every day on that walk.

It's the god of good luck called Hotei. One day he asked the price of it. At that point we were building this house, and he decided he'd like to have the figure for this house. (Because Nat was rather plump, everyone laughed and said, "It looks like you, Nat.") He told the man he wanted to buy it, and he paid for him.

Then he asked the man to deliver it. The Chinese man looked at him so blankly. He couldn't conceive of how he would do anything about it. It's stone: once it's there, it's there. It was on the sidewalk outside the shop. Nat got Gordon Newell, who did our stonework here and has done some of our sculpture, to drive up there with another man in a truck. (You weren't supposed to run a truck down Grant Avenue and load and unload things, and the rain began to come down, a deluge, just solid water coming down.)

Nat went over and talked with a policeman in the middle of California Street and Grant to get his mind off the truck that was going to go in there, swing out with its great tentacles, and raise this stone figure to the back of the truck. [laughter] He was able to keep the attention of the policeman directed to things that were going on in the opposite direction so that the policeman didn't see this happening until they had finally placed the Hotei in the open truck, and then Gordon went on his way and came down here.

Then the question was where to place the figure here. Gordon still wanted to use his truck. Because he was doing all our stonework and using his truck all his time, he didn't want to have

a Hotei in it. And he still had this crane kind of thing attached to it. So he came down the hill and he said, "Now, where is it you want this?"

There were very few places it could be, and could be swung from his truck. So he backed his truck up to that mound where the garage is and where the caretaker's house is now--(it wasn't there then)--and he was able to swing it out and set it down.

Now everything there relates around that Hotei, the stonework, the stairs going up, and the caretaker's house on top of it. And there it is! [laughter]

Riess: Did you want to live in San Francisco?

Owings: Oh, I enjoyed it. But I didn't like living in many places at once. Instead of being able to pack a little bag and go out, because I had everything there, I always took things with me. So I was carrying things back and forth all the time.

One time--I have to tell you this story, but it probably shouldn't ever be told--the owner of the Telegraph Hill place told me when I drove into the garage one day that the big table in the back was where people put things that they wanted to have the Goodwill or the Salvation Army come and take away. I said, "Oh, how good," because I had some things that I wanted to get rid of. So I placed them there.

Perhaps a week or so later I drove into the garage and I saw some wonderful panels lying there--in the end I made one whole show out of those panels--so I picked them up and took them up to our apartment. I also found they had some rattan furniture. Since Mills College was having an auction of things to raise money for the alumni association in San Francisco, I got someone to come with a station wagon, and I drove off with this great rattan furniture. There were several other things, I think, that we took to that auction.

Well, they were all the owner's things! Isn't that wild! [laughter] I didn't find this out until later when the woman said, "You know, you've got to watch <u>everything</u> in this garage. All our rattan furniture was taken." It was the worst moment. I didn't say anything. I just couldn't say anything. I just was absolutely silent and wide-eyed looking at her. I didn't know if I should go out and buy her new furniture or what. Oh my! [laughter] So, that was that.

Riess: Was the place that you had in New Mexico an expansion of the place at Jacona?

Owings: After I married Nat we moved into his house. His house, all the adobe had been cemented over, which I was very scornful of. I said later, "Can't you take this cement off the adobe?" He said, "Why didn't you ask me that before we were married?" [laughs]

I looked at it and looked at it. This was to be my house. There was lots of glass in it, and it was mostly Eames chairs. We had a dozen Eames chairs, and no matter where you went, everywhere there were Eames chairs. And very nice Saarinen chairs. And a marble-topped table. I looked at this very modern place, and it wasn't my taste at all. Gradually I began to sneak in little old things.

And then the incident of the stove came up. I was driving up beyond Espanola where there's a junk place with old furniture. It was a very rainy day in the summer, and they had things like sofas all being rained on, and grass growing up through the iron beds. In the thickest part of the grass I saw a stove. It was one of the little, quaint, wonderful iron stoves. I took one look at it and I thought, "Oh! It's just what I want!" I never thought I wanted a stove before.

Another thing about Nat is that he had tremendous intuition, not only with me but with other people as well. It was one of his biggest factors, actually. I didn't speak about the stove to him, but a few days later he went up and he came back and said, "Margaret, I've seen something I know you'd want." I looked at him and I said, "Is it a stove?" He said, "How did you know?" I said, "Because I've had my eye on it."

So he said, "All right, let's get the truck." He threw in an old tire that still could be used, I guess. He threw it in the back, and we took Leo with us, and we all went up in the big old truck and exchanged the old tire for the stove. That's what we paid for the stove! The man seemed pleased at the time. God knows how long he'd had the stove. It had grass growing around it and through it.

As we drove back, Leo was driving, I was in the middle, and Nat was on the other side. Nat turned to me and said, "What are you going to do with that stove, Margaret?" I already knew what I was going to do with it. I knew exactly what I was going to do with it. But I pretended I didn't. I didn't want him to think I'd been thinking about this. So I said, "Oh, I don't know. I'll give it some thought." Then we talked about it that night after we'd unpacked it and set it out on the earth. I knew what I wanted: I wanted to build a house around the stove. So finally I

said, "I want to build a house around it." And that's what we did.

He said, "Where do you want the house?" I showed him a place where there was an old ditch. The ditches are the arteries of life to the valley. They are the major-domos. There are incredible intricacies of ditches, just like this Milagro Beanfield Wars [book by John Nichols]. The ditch is just so key. I didn't know that at that time. There was a relatively small ditch going along our property, and I said, "I want it right here."

The reason I wanted it there was that there was a wonderful old cottonwood that had died and had turned white but had some black on it from some burning at one time. It was just magnificent, and it was filled with Lewis woodpeckers and their holes, and they were fluttering around. I wanted to be right there with those woodpeckers.

He said, "Yes, that's all right, except this is on the ditch. But we can work that out. We'll put a conduit underneath where the ditch is, and we'll build a house on top of it." (That wasn't done normally with the ditches out there, but I didn't know that.) Anyway, we built it. We put this conduit in and built on top of it.

Every piece of wood in it was old wood that we collected in our truck. Nat became fascinated by this whole thing, because it was utterly the opposite of what he'd done before. Before, he'd always had someone build it, you know. He'd say, "I want this done this way, and I want that done that way," and then he'd go away and come back and it'd be done. Not I. I was right there doing everything the hardest way possible.

We gathered the balustrades and we gathered old doors and deepset windows. I went into the studio one day when they hadn't put all the roof on--the roof was a barn floor--so light was coming in along the top. I said, "Stop!" because it was just marvelous the light coming into this little building. And that was the beginning of our skylights. We had skylights everywhere after that in all the buildings we built.

The adobe building is usually very thick, you know, to keep it warm in winter and cool in summer. Very thick walls. This wasn't anything superficial, these weren't concrete bricks with adobe plastered around them. These were the real thing.

Nat became more and more intrigued with the idea, to the point that after we finally finished my studio and then the main

house, and then the guest house, and then did over the rental unit which used to be the manager's house, and then did over the caretaker's house, which was under the great pump, we were really in the adobe business, to put it mildly. We were in adobe, and took great pleasure out of it.

Riess: Was it difficult getting craftsmen to do it?

Owings: Now it is.

Riess: But it wasn't then?

Owings: No. We used the Indians of the San Juan Pueblo, and we had a wonderful man, Mr. Livermore, who was a builder and carpenter and contractor. He was a man who, no matter what you asked for, instead of the reasons why you can't do it, he'd think it over and he'd say, "Yes, we can do that." And then he began to plan it.

All the drawings for those buildings I gave to him. He kept them for a long time, but he died. I did them in perspective, different views in perspective. I had a lot of fun doing that.

Riess: Was that very provocative of you, to insist on all of this old stuff?

Owings: Actually, Nat loved all the old things and the earth we worked with! [interruption as dog barks] Probably just Jim bringing in the mail.

New Mexico is a place, unlike any other in the United States, that really seizes you. It really gets you. Especially if you suffer through the seasons. I say "suffer" because some are suffering times. From the windstorms to the marvelous foliage in the fall, and the magnificent skies that make up for not having an ocean there. And the winters with snow hanging on the willow trees that we planted, and all over the walls. It was just lovely. And then the summers we had the pastures and the horses and meadowlarks. Meadowlarks everywhere, and the song of the meadowlark is so magnificent.

We became intrigued with the Indians, and we went to the Indian dances and the Indian events that took place. Nat especially became an aficionado of the Hopis. He would leave here in Big Sur sometimes just to fly out for a Hopi dance, and then fly back.

Riess: Did he really know the Indians, the Hopis?

Owings: He knew quite a few of them. And then he had a Kachina collection that he gathered over the years. He had some good friends. Some of them closed their doors, you know, in a way, to many white people. Others are sensitive to writers or people of a more sensitive nature. But Nat had his own way, and seemed to make friends. We'd have the Hopis here, bring them out here and have them here.

There was a big Kachina show at the California Academy of Sciences that Nat really instigated. He helped George Lindsay and became very much involved with it. It was difficult for him to work with them because he didn't agree with all the things, and that made it difficult. But it was quite a show, and it travelled to key spots in the United States. He gave all of his Kachinas, of which there must have been about a hundred and fifty, to the California Academy of Sciences.

That meant the most to him. Something in the Kachina's simplicity and honesty and earnestness of standing on the soil he admired immensely. It was, again, a spiritual thing. He wrote about that. The catalogue of the Kachina show, I think, has an introductory piece by him, and he did it very well. It was a thrill for him, it was a great thrill to be standing on top of the mesa and hear the tortoise shells clanking together on the ankles of the runners as they came up out of the desert at dawn.

I did it with him quite a bit, but when he started doing it from Big Sur I was involved with too many conservation issues. I was on the State Park Commission, I was working on all these other things, and I couldn't keep rushing back and forth.

Riess: That was very intense, for him.

Owings: Yes, it meant a great deal to him. [pauses, then speaks quietly] I think at the end of his life it meant more to him than anything. He wasn't a scholar, but he had this intuitive quality and therefore sensed things and read into things. I don't know of any man I've known who was more intuitive than Nat. And you wouldn't think that from the kind of personality he has. He seems to be a happy fellow, well-met, laughing and joking. But behind that he had this incredible sensitivity.

I must speak about another thing about Nat. I've spoken about his flaws, and the difficulties he had in getting along with people, and his condemnations of people he didn't happen to agree with. But he had an extraordinary sense of leadership, which is really what built up Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill into that enormous firm--out of two young, penniless men in Chicago.

They began with nothing, absolutely nothing, not even an office. He went down to the dimestore and stood by while they did up some stationery for him so that he could write a letter to someone that said, "Skidmore and Owings" on it. And he gave the address of a friend's office! [laughter] That's the way it began. It began that simply. But in no time it was moving ahead very rapidly.

Riess: The combination of leadership and intuition sounds powerful.

Owings: It is. He was a rare person, a very rare person. But at the same time he could be very childish.

It reminds me of Edwin Land, who had an air of such simple, shy childishness, and yet he had the ability to invent the Polaroid. He was walking out in New Mexico with his daughter, and she said, "Why is it that when we take a picture we always have to send it off and it takes so long?" And he said, "I'm going to make a camera that will develop its own film in just a few minutes."

We saw a lot of him out there for a period of time. He was practicing with his Polaroid, and Ansel was practicing with his Polaroid, and I would just spend days with them out there. They were taking different angles of the house. They loved the little details of the house.

Riess: Ansel Adams, you say, was there too?

Owings: Out there doing it too, yes.

Riess: In color, or black and white? There is black and white Polaroid film, I think.

Owings: Yes, but these were all in color.

Land was not one with Ansel's sensitivity to the many qualities of the composition. He was interested more in what Polaroid did for people. In other words, it brought them together. They'd pull the film out, and--he'd take a picture of Nat and myself, and then he'd pull it out, and then he'd have someone take a picture of us all together, looking at it. He published it in the annual book that comes out from Polaroid, and he spoke about friendships made and so on. It was very interesting.

Riess: You were speaking of how he and Nat had something of the same personality?

Owings: Land had that opposite thing of the simple child, not always being able to grasp what people were talking about in other veins, and he'd be cross if he didn't have his way--but then, he could soar! Nat was a little that way.

Riess: Did Nat's personality change after he stopped drinking?

Owings: Yes, it made a great difference. He set about for a while trying to remember incidents, many of which he wasn't aware of except at the time--but one doesn't forgive him for that--when he did things or said things under the strong influence of alcohol. Anything he did, he did a lot of.

I didn't fully realize he had a serious alcohol problem. He had said to me before we were married, "I am not an alcoholic," and I believed him. But it had been an issue and I was uneasy. I thought, "Maybe I can help him to taper that down." He did taper down when he was with me, but then when he wasn't he went overboard again. But that treatment at Raleigh Hills left an indelible impression upon him.

Riess: He referred to it as "tissue release." Is that a clinical term?

Owings: That's interesting. I'd forgotten about that term.

Riess: What was the treatment?

Owings: They gave you emetine and different drugs, and you were given a lot of different alcohols. You are terribly sick, but it isn't as if they just did that chemical treatment. There's a psychological treatment that goes with it. And then you have to go through it all again. It's miserable. It's terrible. Until you just can't stand the smell of alcohol, and certainly can't stand the taste. It didn't always last with some, but it certainly lasted with Nat. He'd get terribly upset when we'd go into a place and they'd immediately want to bring him drinks. He'd say, "No, I want just a glass of soda water."

I'll read you something I haven't seen for years and years. It's from the first letter he wrote to me when he went to Raleigh Hills for his alcoholic treatment.

> My dearest wife,
>
> ...I've had my first treatment. I will be talking to you before you get this, but I wanted to sit down and talk to you in private, which only can be done on paper....Before I'm through, I can see why I will be revolted by liquor of any kind....I feel

released, because although the treatments get tougher, they say, I know the general idea and it all makes sense.

The nurses are wonderful. The place is full of drunks at all stages. I'm seeing a side of life I never expected to see. Humility is the biggest word, next to love, for me. Not for a moment am I unaware of the effect on you of all of this, and I must depend on your note which says, "The past is past and the new strength will support our confidence in the future."

All my love.

Nat

Isn't it a touching letter?

Riess: Touching, and very serious.

Owings: Yes. I found it not long ago, and I didn't throw it away. I've been trying to get rid of things, but I thought, "No, this meant so much to him."

Riess: The spiritual thing there, the humility, was that something he got from the treatment?

Owings: Yes. He went back to apologize to people. He wrote notes to people for about a year. He'd suddenly think, "Oh, my god, when I was with him last, what I said!" So he'd write a note and tell them that he had seen what he had done when he was under the influence of alcohol.

Riess: Where is Raleigh Hills?

Owings: In Portland. They have a number of such clinics now. It works fine for some, but they must really want to do it. You can't just be dragged up there, or in no time you'll be back. A lot of truck drivers, taxicab drivers--it was interesting the kinds of people that were there, men and women.

Riess: What times would you and Nat be in New Mexico, rather than here?

Owings: It's hard being split. We had gotten rid of the Chicago house, and had gotten rid of the San Francisco apartment, and then we'd gotten rid of the stone house. So then we just had this place and the place in New Mexico. Even that was hard, because it was a split in my life. I loved both places so much.

Riess: During the sixties, when you were doing so many things, the park commission, and other work in California--?

Owings: Yes, I was frantic then. It was even hard in the summers, when in theory I always spent the time there, and then going up into the Sierras. It was difficult for me, and I wouldn't have done it had it not been for Nat saying, "All right, let's do it." And so I'd do it.

Riess: In the midst of all of that did you use one of them as a place that you could get away to?

Owings: People always thought here that when I went to New Mexico I was getting away from all the responsibilities and things that were going on here that I'd gotten involved in so deeply. [laughing]

Riess: In your second marriage, did you need to get away? Could you use one or the other as a place to be more secluded?

Owings: Yes, it was more secluded out there.

Riess: Have you always had your own studio?

Owings: Yes, that little studio, the little one with the stove in it, that was my first getaway place.

[tape interruption]

Owings: People sent me letters after Nat's death, personal letters written to me, very genuine letters. One could only choose a few paragraphs or lines from them, but the effect he had on people--. I thought of quoting some of those lines, not because the people were important themselves, but there were a remarkably large number of people, mostly men in architecture, for whom he made the big difference in their lives, and who wrote letters to that effect. I thought that that was something I'd like to have go on the record. I'm going to send all these letters to young Nat, and probably he'll send them to the Library of Congress.

ARCHITECTURE CALIFORNIA

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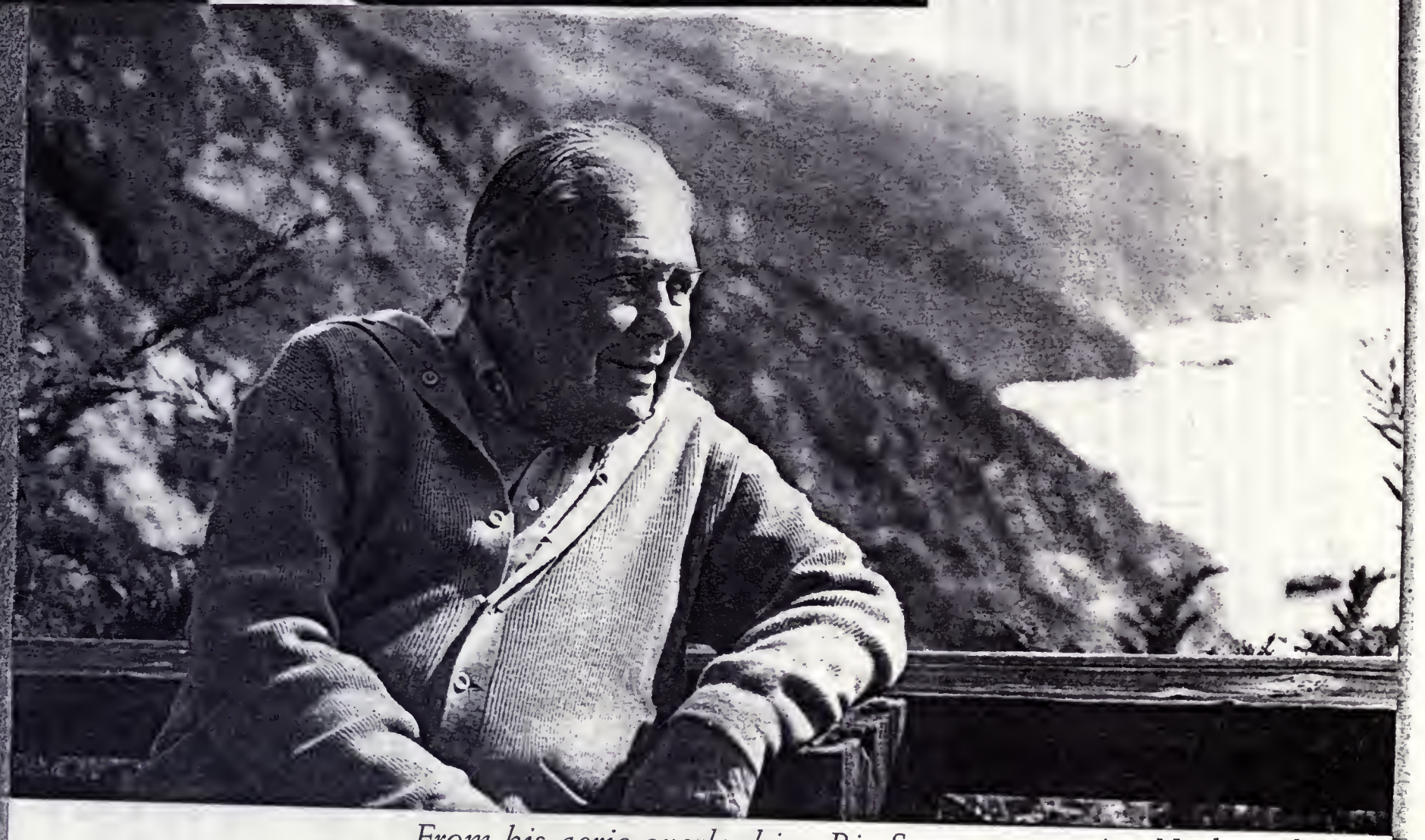
"The greatest living architect with the greatest architectural design cannot do much without the land. The environment is the basis for everything."



From his aerie overlooking Big Sur, octogenarian Nathaniel A. Owings, FAIA reflects upon architecture, the firm he co-founded, and the 1983 Gold Medal just awarded him by The American Institute of Architects.

81a

When I was at my peak as an active partner, I dealt with the chairmen of the board and presidents of corporations . . . they were the only ones who could make a decision. They cared because they owned the buildings, it was their gothic cathedral. Now, since I've been out of it the last ten years, people have been dealing with high pressure, entrepreneur-type developers who don't own anything, except maybe the building for a short time. The personal quality of dealing with the real owner of a building is gone. You're dealing with a developer who wants the snozzle; he wants the glittering lights; he wants to sell it and get out.

You say you are opposed to skyscrapers, yet in most urban areas SOM is synonymous with skyscrapers.

We've built quite a few more than any other firm, because we're so good at it.

This firm is now made up of, we'll say, my grandchildren. They don't want me around. They don't want me to tell them what to do. These young men, they are doing their thing as they see it. And who can fault the Sears Building as a great piece of design?

I do not pretend to try to influence or affect the firm in any way, except personally. And I don't try to do that very much, because if I went in there and tried to get them to change, that probably would drive them into an attitude of doing it more than they do now. They don't want the old man around. To hell with him.

But I'm free to get up and lecture and talk and say what I can. And I do, throughout the country. I don't believe in what they're doing. They're doing buildings well—they haven't lost the touch of great design, great architecture—but they're following in the route of the decline and fall of our society. I hope that this depression will change that to some extent. I hope they'll get wise to themselves.

If you were to take control of SOM now, how would you change things?

I'd go back to a tree. You've heard of a tree? Some people haven't. The Sears Building should have a mile square around it . . . a park . . . that should be contributed back to the community.

Urbanism, if you study it carefully, has got something to do with the quality of life. Well, when they get too many skyscrapers—and too many is usually two in a row—you've got to do something about it. I would plan my city on the terms of what a building can do for the city.

Indianapolis is as good an example as any. Washington Street, a mile long, is dead, dying, gone. They built two skyscrapers, full of shops. Those buildings should have been spread out on each side of Washington Street. Take a 40 story building, lay it on its side, have it four-stories high. Use high-density design—which is in the Pueblo Indians, it's in the Incas, every society—to give great quality to the area instead of making the area a wind-swept hell.

One of the worst examples that I know of is on Madison Avenue. The skyscrapers are an example of utter greed at all levels. The companies hired the architects to do surgery on the building faces, to make them look pretty. But down below they've added probably 3 million square feet of space, and maybe 50,000 people a day to a street that's still the same. It's all nuts.

Every time a skyscraper is built, it's built because it is the easiest, cheapest, quickest way to create a lot of space fast and create an ego statement. But it's the worst thing you can do for a town.

As our global village continues to shrink, is architecture evolving styles and applications that are universally appropriate?

No. There isn't any movement toward anything but disintegration, degradation, and lack of dignity. There is a universal blight spreading over all values that have to do with permanency.

We are coming to the end of the road. We are running out of resources. The architect's losing his grip . . . he is becoming nearly obsolete as a factor in society. And I want him to get back in there.

What trends do you see affecting architecture in the next few years?

I think the trends are toward disaster. We are in worse than the Dark Ages, because the Dark Ages produced my gothic cathedral. There's no trends except downward to negativeness, to miasma. The highest evolution would be toward respect for open space and minimizing of construction until the quality of a building equals the amount of money you have to pay for it.

What is your opinion of recent budgetary reductions which virtually gut the California Coastal Commission and the California Energy Commission?

These are disasters. Now this gets back to politics. Pressure politics. The AIA has adopted this strategy of political impact groups.

We don't intend to let the Coastal Commission die. We have got a Big Sur Land Trust down here, private, non-profit, to take its place. We're going to fight it every step of the way—the beaches, the farms, as Churchill said.

The greatest living architect with the greatest architectural design cannot do much without the land. The environment is the basis for everything. Therefore, you've got to fight for that first. There isn't an architect alive who hasn't got the ability to influence a certain group of people.

We don't live very long. We can raise hell with the land awfully fast. But to protect it is a day-to-day operation. The answer is to fight back.

from California Architecture, March/April 1983

V ARTIST, WIFE, AND MOTHER

Review of Art Studies

Lage: We are going to turn now to talk about your art. We started talking about art and advocacy, which may or may not go together. I had mentioned to you that when I interviewed Wallace Stegner he seemed to feel that these were two separate parts of his life.

Owings: That astonishes me more than almost anything I know, because his writing can be a very high and beautiful art, as it was in the statements that he wrote for me that we auctioned off when we were raising money for our lion work. This was surely an advocacy effort.

He and Mary had just come back from some trip far away, and he had a temperature of 102 degrees, or something like that. He talked to me from his bed. I gave him that article I had written on the lion. He said, "I don't know why I should be writing about the lion, Margaret, and besides, I feel so sick."

I said, "Wally, this time you can. Just relax and think about the lion and write something." Afterwards, I wrote to him, "I think you should always be sick when you write, and also have something that you are really aiming to help and preserve and respect and describe in such a magnificent selection of words," which he did.

Lage: We're going to include that?

Owings: No, it's probably too long. Stegner is certainly one who combined art and advocacy. Ansel Adams, of course, is certainly another one. Myself, perhaps my writing. In art, meaning art with a brush, I studied with--shall I talk about my art?

Lage: Yes. I know you talked earlier a bit about your formal education and museum work, but not much about your actual development as an artist.

Owings: I always knew I was an artist. If anyone asked me what I was or what I was going to be, I'd just say, "An artist." When I was quite young I began to draw the things around outside, because I loved our garden. I loved our rocks and trees and acorns. Those things meant a lot to me. I also then drew villages, and I had long lines of villages all around the top of my walls, up by my ceiling. I drew birds. It was my thing.

Lage: And your parents encouraged you?

Owings: Yes. My mother took me down to the California Arts and Crafts School on Allston Way in Berkeley, in an old Victorian house. I was about six then, if that old. We went into these rooms with the students sitting on tall stools and I was about here [indicates small size], and I couldn't even see what they were drawing. I looked at the stools and the students and admired them so.

Mother said, "Margaret, next year you can come down here on Saturdays." First I was taken by car, and then I began to make it alone on the streetcar. But it was just beginning drawing, doing charcoal drawing of a bowl and an apple and things of that nature. Then it was doing plaster casts of a hand and things of that sort. It wasn't anything original. It was just the more traditional form of training at that time.

But it helped me to go on, and I had a very good friend, Dorothy Van Gorder, who needed a home, and she came to be a companion for my grandmother. She did beautiful artwork at the California Arts and Crafts School. So I had her for my inspiration.

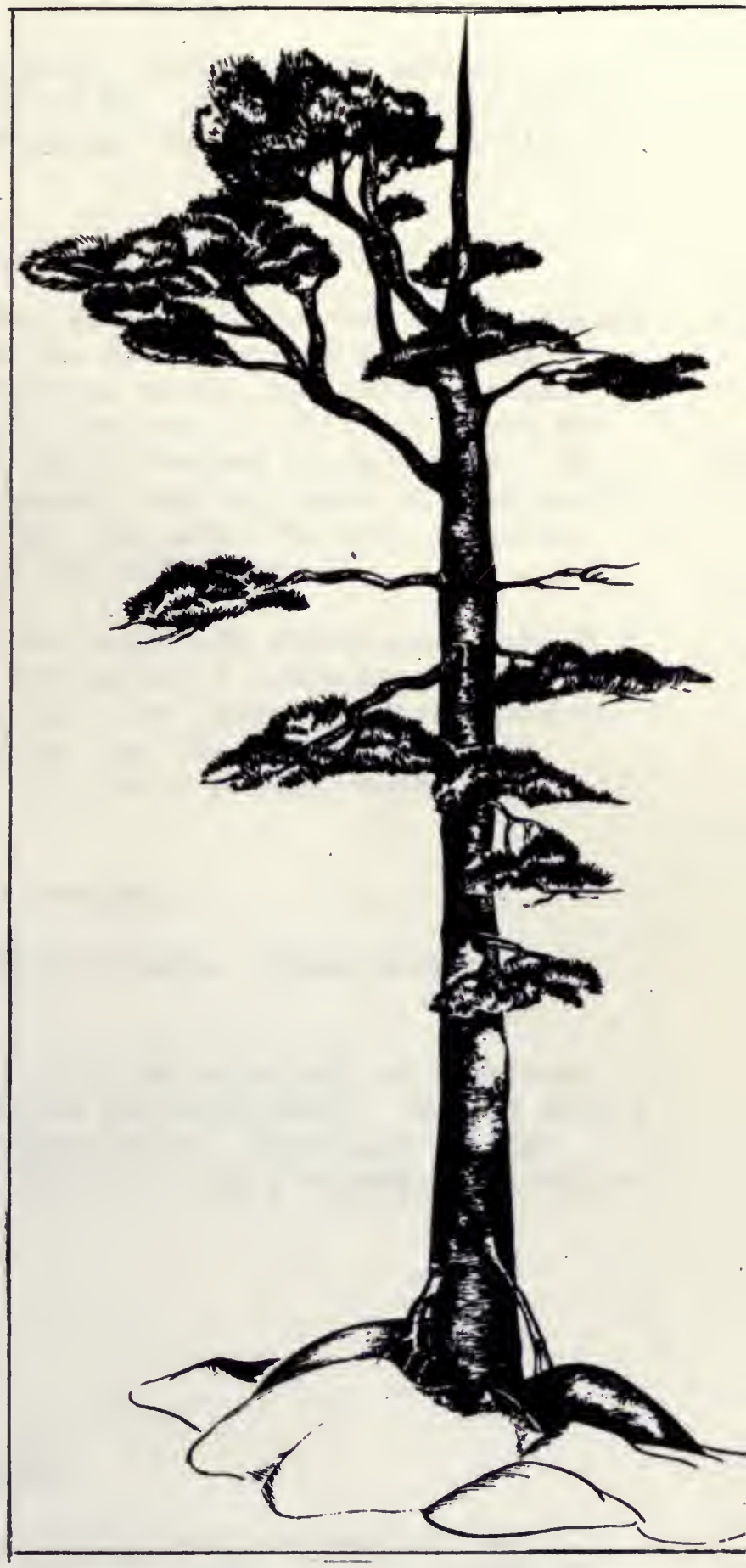
Then I went to Anna Head School, where art was not a factor at all. They did have a studio room, and the main thing we did there was to use pastel chalk, coloring all the tops of the paper blue, and then you colored the lower portions of the paper green. That was, to me, a very boring thing. So I began to make posters, because I had been reading Heidi. I began to make posters of Switzerland.

Lage: In school?

Owings: Yes, totally different from what the other kids were doing.

Then the years went by. I went to Mills and I majored in art. I have a picture of myself that they used in one of their books. You might be interested in it. I worked under Roi Partridge, who is the etcher. His fine line of etching, and the

Stream dropping down from Cup Lake
at Echo Lake, 1949
Margaret Wentworth



Old Tamarack tree, Dartmouth Cove
Echo Lake
Margaret Wentworth

things that he selected for subjects, including the mountains and the granite and the trees, thrilled me. I was always very close with both Roi and Imogen [Cunningham], who was married to him at the time.

Lage: Did that change your style at all? Did you take up etching?

Owings: No, I didn't take up etching, but what I did do next was in summer session to study under Obata at the University of California. That was using Sumi paint, a Japanese brush, and rubbing your stone. He took an interest in me because I took an interest in him. I had a very steady hand, and I learned to do horses. He remembered me. Years later my mother went to Japan on a trip with the Obatas, and other people, too. He said, "Oh yes, Margaret Wentworth. She's the one who always did horses."

At any rate, then I began the birds and the grasses, which I like. I went up to Echo Lake, and we had a cabin up there. I began to draw up there. I began to draw these old dead trees on the little islands that were there, and the beautiful stream coming down through the aspen. All those things became very thrilling to me.

Lage: These were black and white line drawings?

Owings: All black and white. This is before Obata. Obata gave me more freedom.

Then we began every summer to go up on a trip to Vogelsang and all the high camps [in Yosemite National Park]. That's when I painted the stream in many different ways. And a lot of that period and that work when John Muir was such a strong influence on me I've already spoken about.

Carmel and the New Group

Lage: What brought color into your work?

Owings: Something about the place I was living, and the people. We started what we called the "New Group" because we were tired of the Carmel Art Association. We felt we wanted to be superior. [laughs] I'm not sure we were superior, but we were with the New Group, and it started at our stone house in the Carmel Highlands in the late forties.

Lage: Shall we mention some of the people who were part of that?

Owings: Yes. There was Richard Lofton, who painted in oils. I have a little one of a whale skeleton out on Lobos that he did, and also we bought one of big whale bones that we used to have hanging some place. Nat and I had that later.

And there was Sam Colburn, who did watercolors. And Erica Frank, who did things like Tiepolo, because she had been in Europe and the Isle of Capri for a long time. Don [Ephraim] Doner--he was much a part of us. We had enough of us so that big studio in the stone house was completely filled with paintings, with each one being given the opportunity to hang one painting. Among the artists in our New Group were Jerry Wasserman, Virginia Blair, Emil White, Henry Miller, Bruce Ariss, Elwood Graham, Louisa Jenkins and Jean Kellogg.

When we first moved into the house, its size weighed heavily on me. When I was in bed at night I would think, "Oh, that studio is so empty." That's when we started making it into something alive. We also got my grandmother's old piano, and we had concerts there. We did that kind of thing. So it was then that I began to paint. I have some of those paintings in the chest.

Lage: Were they oils?

Owings: No. I used acrylics and I used tempera. I had several shows with that.

Lage: What were the subjects?

Owings: Nearly all sea, because the sea gardens had always intrigued me, and so I did it of the sea gardens and the big crabs. I did it not in the exacting, scientific drawing, but with more freedom and color.

Lage: But still with a certain amount of realism?

Owings: Yes.

Art on the Road, the Scratch Technique

Owings: Then I married Nat, and he wanted to travel a great deal. So I started a technique that I worked out myself, designed so that I could carry it in my suitcase.

I had illustration board that was strong enough to be almost like an easel. I didn't have to carry an easel around with me. I'd cut the board just to fit the bottom of my suitcase. Then I'd put on these boards Pelikan inks, half red, half black, or different greens and blues, or white or yellow, or rust. I did quite a few in rust. Then I used a kind of oil crayon, not a very good crayon. (They stopped making them because they were poison, but I didn't know that at the time.)

I would cover those colors of ink with sometimes all white, or sometimes all black or sometimes all red. Then when we would go places, such as Turkey, I did the houses of Turkey, and I had a full show of that up in San Francisco at the Feingarten Gallery. Then I did Morocco.

After putting the crayon on, I had sharp instruments and I did like an etched line on it.

Lage: Kind of scratched out to reveal the color that was underneath?

Owings: Yes, yes. Sometimes lovely surprises came. Other times, I knew exactly what I was doing.

Then on top of that I put, again, Pelikan ink, sometimes making the whole thing black, and then wiped it off. In other words, I worked out a system of painting. I think I must have had six shows of this. I was going to have one at a special small gallery beside the Piazza Despana in Rome, because it was while we were in Rome that I was working in that technique.

Lage: Did you draw upon anybody's examples for this technique?

Owings: No, it just developed out of me. I loved to do them. People seemed to like them, so that I nearly always sold all of them.

[interruption to look at Owings's work. See following page.]

Owings: While I lived in the Carmel Highlands I think nearly everything I did related to the sea and sea birds and the shells. That was it. That was what I did.

Lage: Then the color began with the travels through Europe?

Owings: Yes. That was altogether different, in a way. Color, of course, was a big factor, but I always wanted it subtle, and I loved the oldness of Rome and therefore wanted the old look. The pieces all looked as if they were worn out by the time I was finished with them.

And that reminds me of my husband and I stopping at the art museum at Colorado Springs. Nat always rushed through a thing. It was the end of a day when we had been with the Secretary of the Air Force and with all these people. We had to drive back to Santa Fe that night, but he wanted to stop in at the museum. (This was the way I lived with my husband.)

We rushed into the museum, and they were just closing it, but we said, "No, we've got to come in." We came in and tore around, and Nat said, "I want to buy that." It was a Burri. Burri's work was sometimes fantastically awful, these great blobs of things, but there was something horribly attractive about it. It was complete abstraction, some black and white on old dirty rags and things.

Just as we were going out the door--

Lage: With the painting?

Owings: No, they had to send it because it wouldn't fit in the car.

--the director came down, and Nat and I introduced ourselves, and Nat said, "Well, I liked it [the Burri] the best of all the work you have got here except, of course, I haven't gone through your garbage can." [laughter]

Lage: He must have shocked people.

Owings: He was always shocking people.

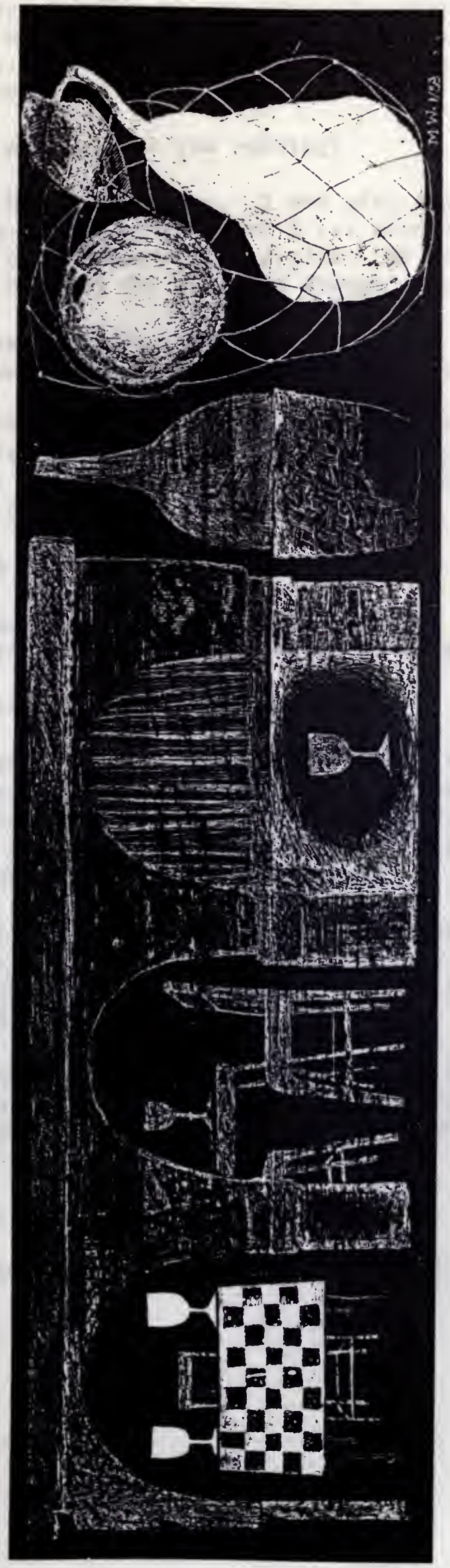
When we lived on Telegraph Hill for a couple of years--we weren't there very much, we were always someplace else--I did a whole apartment around that painting.

Lage: Did you and Nat usually agree in your tastes?

Owings: Yes, yes we did. I would not have myself picked that one out, but I was still strangely attracted to it. Then we gave it to the San Francisco Museum of Art later on when we left there and came down here. I was thinking the other day, it would be nice to have it down here, but I haven't any room for it. [laughter]

Art in the Living Room, with Proust

Lage: Did your art change at all because of Nat?



Rome, 1958 Scratch Technique

Trattoria

Margaret Owings

Owings: Yes, in a way, because he was very possessive of me, and when he was home he wanted me not to be down in my studio, down in that little place. But somehow I worked a lot and I would say I did about six shows.

Lage: And in what medium were you working?

Owings: I was doing black and brown. I was also doing some more of my scratch work. When he was home I sat down there and he sat here. He liked to sit in front of the fire. We liked to read aloud, and that's when he read the whole of Proust to me.

Lage: When you were designing this house, did you always intend to have a work of yours here [at entrance to main room]?

Owings: Yes, I had planned it, more or less. Nat loved it when I was working on it--I would have a light over here, and he would be sitting over there with the fire going. And this [looking at piece under discussion] I could do while he read.

Lage: How long did a piece like this take?

Owings: I don't know, because I only did it when he read. We probably got through a great deal of Proust with it. [laughter]

Lage: Would you describe this for the tape?

Owings: I have always liked old leaves with cracks or holes in them. Georgia O'Keeffe liked these leaves and liked the holes. I found a leaf for her that she could take home. We have a picture of her holding the leaf. When I got to her house and knew her well later, I found that old dead leaf there.

Then, I loved dragonflies, so I put them there. I didn't want it to hit anyone. I just thought many people would rush right through, and nobody would see it. But suddenly they do. Once in a while, someone comes and actually <u>looks</u> at it, which is astonishing. It wasn't anything remarkable. I did it with a brush. I didn't do it with pen. I did much better work--all my black and white work I did with a brush. It was much better than later when the pens came out, and I used those. They lacked vitality.

Lage: It's about six feet high and five feet wide.

Owings: Yes. It's an old dead leaf with holes in it, and a dragonfly. [laughter]

Lage: A modest description of something very lovely. Did you work from a leaf or just from your imagination?

Owings: Both. Elizabeth Gordon, editor of House Beautiful magazine, put together a very sensitive issue on "Shobui" in September 1960. She commissioned me to do another leaf and insect using my scratch technique in brown and white.

Stitchery, and the de Young Show, 1963

Lage: We were talking about how you moved up here from your studio to work.

Owings: Yes, that is when I started the stitchery. That pleased both Nat and me a great deal because I could be closer to him. I stretched the cloth first on a regular painting stretcher. I had a little thing that I could put it up on and stand back and see it or I could throw it on the floor and look at it.

Lage: Had you worked with fabric before?

Owings: No.

Lage: I saw a picture of you in New Mexico where it looks like you were weaving.

Owings: Yes, I did weave out there, and it was Virginia Adams [Ansel Adams's wife] who gave me her old loom. That loom had formerly belonged to Dorothy Wright Liebes, who was very well known in San Francisco, and who started using the wonderful magenta colors, pinks, and grasses.

Lage: That had been her loom, and she gave it to Virginia Adams?

Owings: She gave it to Virginia Adams. Then Virginia Adams, trying to keep up with Ansel, which was a pretty big job, finally just closed up her loom and sent it out to me. I had it out in New Mexico. Weaving became a kind of therapy for me. I also used pieces of cloth I bought or old bedspreads stretched on the frame.

Lage: When you were here doing your stitching?

Owings: Yes. Yes.

Lage: Was there an inspiration for that besides the necessity, again, of being available to Nat?

Owings: No. But I grew awfully fond of it. Downstairs, I have a bag about this big of pieces of cloth. Three of us had a show at the de Young Museum.

Lage: All of fabric art and stitchery?

Owings: No. I was the fabric one. And Loet Vanderveen was in the show. He did that sort of pod outside. He does animals now, in bronze, and sells them at Gump's. He is very popular and very gifted. The third artist was Gordon Newell, who did all this stonework here, and who did that head outside the bathroom window, and the piece of redwood carved with all the forms of the universe. Outside, on the porch, there is a hawk that he did. I'm giving it to the Community Hospital.

At any rate, the three of us did the de Young show together. They were completely different things, and it was in the big room. I have little booklets and things.

Lage: How does a show like that happen? Do you recall what the inspiration for it was?

Owings: I have forgotten almost.

Lage: Did someone have the idea of putting the three of you together?

Owings: Someone must have! [laughter] It was "a natural" with Gordon's and Loet's and my work. If I do say so, it was a very handsome show. I had the fish that is downstairs, which you've seen, and the chalice over the desk, along with some twenty other pieces.

I did a whole period in my life of chalices. I have done lots and lots of chalices.

Lage: When was that period?

Owings: That period was during our travels. Nat and I went to some church in Spain where they were featuring the Madonna. In a side room of this chapel, which was all heavy, old early stonework, they had sort of a table and on it was a chalice. The chalice was like this [gestures], and they had a spotlight on it. In their Catholic way, they believed that this was <u>the</u> chalice.

Lage: <u>The one</u>?

Owings: Yes. But it was magnificent, just magnificent. It didn't matter to me whether it was <u>the one</u> or not because I was just fascinated

by the aura that came from its shape and so on. So I started doing chalices. I did quite a few; I did some large ones.

Lage: In what medium?

Owings: At first I did them in my work there, my scratched-line work. But I sold all of them. Then, when I began stitchery, I began doing them in that form.

Lage: Did something that was you continue from one form of art into another?

Owings: Yes. I have a line that I wrote in one of the folders, an announcement of a show.

[interruption]

Lage: This is the brochure that went with the de Young exhibit of stitchery. [See following page.]

Owings: Yes.

Lage: In your statement, which we will include, you say, "Stitchery has always been a woman's delight, a craft in harmony with life, an act of doing attending the act of being," which is a very nice statement.

I was caught by the bringing in of the woman's role because you have never brought it in as we have talked about other things.

Owings: I never think about myself very much. But I had two men on either side, and I think that is one reason I featured it. I think in another statement I made at another show, I did it better. Again, I still remarked about myself as a woman.

Lage: But did you, yourself, sew or quilt as you grew up?

Owings: No. Not much. I have never done much.

Lage: As a child you weren't taught? Often, women of that era did a lot of stitchery.

Owings: Not really. I wasn't taught anything, but I did intricate things, absolutely intricate things.

Lage: With a needle and thread?

Owings: With a needle and thread. One time I was in a French class in Anna Head School, and our teacher had brought her instructor from

CERAMICS
LOET VANDERVEEN

STITCHERY
MARGARET WENTWORTH

SCULPTURE
GORDON NEWELL

CERAMICS
LOET VANDERVEEN

FROM THE BIG SUR

M. H. DEYOUNG
MEMORIAL MUSEUM
SAN FRANCISCO
JANUARY 29 THROUGH
FEBRUARY 24, 1963

My work is created where I live, in the isolation of Big Sur — yet truly speaking, isolation here merely means neighbors live out of sight. What is in sight are the products of earth, sky and sea, and from these vegetative forms, textures and movements in growth, come my sources of inspirational "push." Trunks of sycamore cored by lacy rot of time — resembling cathedral shells. The seed pods of poppy and scented eucalyptus, stylized units of perfection, delights in design and functional utility—sea forms, wind and wave patterns are seen, felt, translated and offered to the viewer by me in my work in a sharing sense of what I hope will be a commonly felt love. Out of these same basic elements, the air, earth and water, grow the reality of my ceramics.

STITCHERY
MARGARET WENTWORTH*

SCULPTURE
GORDON NEWELL

Texture and color interwoven into design have always claimed my attention. Living on the slopes of the Big Sur I watch the seasons accentuate the textures on the cliffs and hills and the colors vibrate from the sea and sky. To make order out of a heap of pebbles, a handful of grasses, a pile of threads or a basket of fabrics is my greatest pleasure. To create my own textures through collages of old embroideries and braids; a needle and scissors, my tools; multicolored cloth and ravelled threads, my palette. Stitchery has always been woman's delight, a craft in harmony with life, an act of doing attending the act of being.

*Mrs. Nathaniel A. Owings

The vital forms of nature, hills and sea, as they are revealed in the changing light are a primary motivation in my work. I like to carve outside and roofless and feel and see the day alter.

Many of the stones that I work with are natural stones, found by streams and beaches, or in mountains or deserts. The search for such stones is an important part of the work I do. Sometimes the shape is suggestive, but in an emotional rather than a literal way.

One passes many rocks, but knows when one speaks.

the University to watch her teaching the French class. I was sitting in back of the room with my own work. My own work consisted of a box that I could open carefully. Inside, I had tin foil, and I was very able with my fingers in little things. I made a little dining room. I had a table with some legs and little chairs.

Lage: Out of foil?

Owings: Out of tin foil, twisted and pressed and so forth. Suddenly this teacher, awfully nice teacher--it was a terrible time for me to have done this, of course--said, "Margaret, what are you doing?" I said, "Oh, this." As the class came to a close, she said, "Could I see what you are doing?" So I brought the box up with this dining room that I had done. I had just done it while I was in the class.

She was so astonished by it, and then the man came over, who was watching her teach, and he observed this. They couldn't believe what I had done. They asked if they could take it away with them, and they did, they did take it to show someone.

Art, Nature, and Conservation Work

Lage: We have talked about the various types of art you have been involved with, and we were up to the stitchery phase. Was there something that came after that? Or when you got involved with the conservation affairs, did that take your time?

Owings: That took my time. It took my time so that I almost stopped everything but that. I ended up--as you go through the Otter Raft, you know, the drawings are by Jennifer and myself. Mine weren't anything important. But still I did otters, and I did the cards. We sold things at Christmas and did all that kind of thing.

Lage: So it was mainly then related and in service to your various campaigns.

Owings: Yes, yes.

Lage: That's a point in itself. You had made a remark about the importance of nature in your art.

Owings: I said that for me art and nature go hand in hand. To have the number of shows that I had during a certain number of years meant

that I worked steadily in my studio. Altogether, I had over a dozen one-man shows.

Lage: Would you spend several hours a day with your art?

Owings: Oh, if I had time I'd work the whole day. Nat was often away, so I had time--although in the summertime I had the children. That was a busy time because it was Nat's children and my Wendy. I didn't care for social life very much. I just loved to get into my studio and work.

Then when I got moved into the conservation field--"moving in" sounds rather ridiculous--I just had to kind of let go of the art. [interruption--dog barking]

Lage: We were talking about how involvement in conservation drew you away from your art.

Owings: Yes. It really cut me off from it.

Lage: Is that a regret at all?

Owings: Yes, it is, but I didn't have the time. When I was working on the shows I was spending as many hours of the day as I could. In my little studio down there I always had things out ready to work on and ready to finish. I had a framer to take things to. I would have the show set up with a date, so I would have a deadline and so on.

Then it was just as demanding when I became involved in, first, the beaches of Carmel and getting that; then the sea lions; then the lions; and then the sea otters. But there were always little things along the way, like the five trees, which haven't been resolved yet.

Lage: You seemed to put more of your artistic energies into writing at that time. I wonder if the artistic impulse came out in your writing.

Owings: I think writing can be as creative as art in the other sense. It is interesting that Nat's daughter Jennifer, who does such beautiful drawings and has been very successful at illustrating many books, much in demand, suddenly started to write. She wrote a book herself and found it was <u>as</u> creative. Finally she said, "I think writing is <u>more</u> creative than what I was doing before."

Lage: What is her last name?

Owings: Dewey.

A molecule of life,
this coastal rock—
Engulfed by wind and sea wave,
guarding the rafting otter,
while a sentinel commerant
finds refuge
above the turbulence.

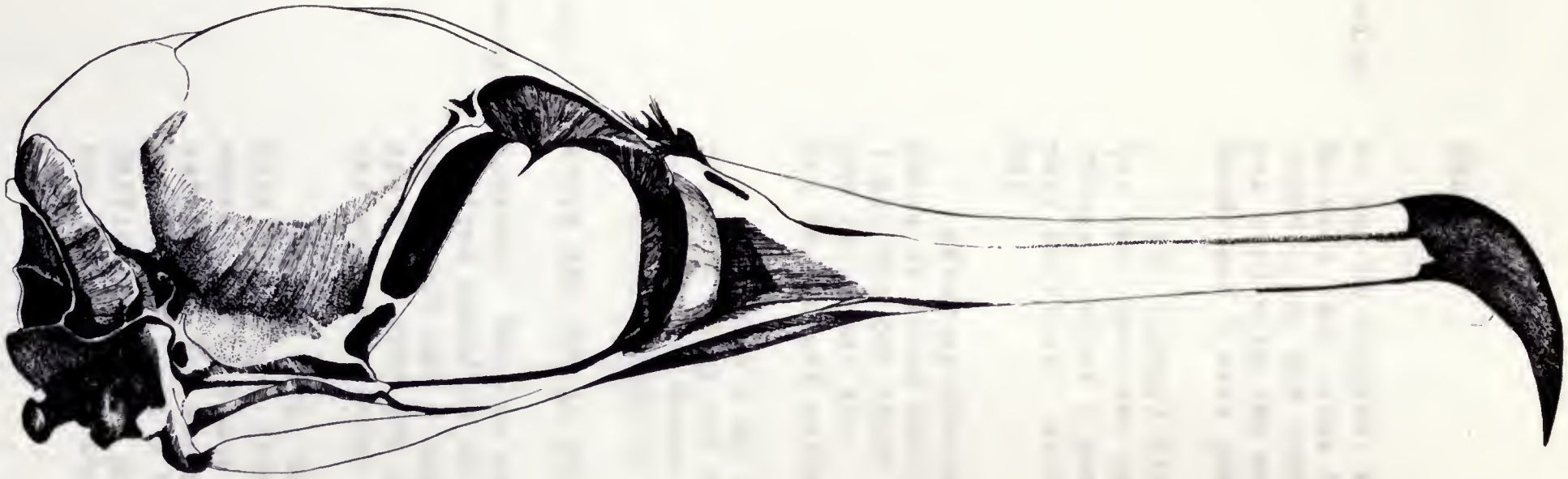
GREETINGS FROM THE SEA!

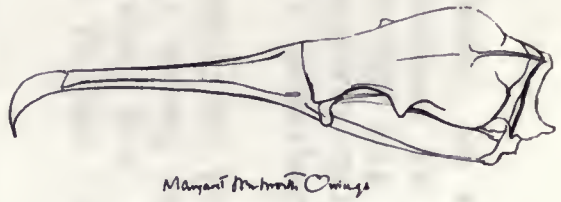
Margaret Owings

1989 Christmas Card

Right--Cormorant and Worn
Shell from the Sea of Cortez
1964

"My hands from a booklet I put together in the Three Arts Club, Chicago. (I was secretary of the board.)"





Above: Skull of friget bird, found on island in the Sea of Cortez. Margaret Owings, 1970

Left: Bookplate made for young Nat Owings

NATHANIEL OTIS OWINGS

93c

Lage: Jennifer Dewey.

Wendy

Owings: As for my daughter Wendy, we were closest when she was a child. We were very close because we lived out in Illinois among the thorn trees and under the big elms. It was the war time, and Mac was away with the merchant marines. So that was a period that Wendy and I were just together all the time.

She learned birds; she pressed flowers; she learned quite a bit then when she was young and I drew her attention to all those things. After I married Nat, that was a difficult change for her, very difficult, even though it opened up a whole new family for her.

After my divorce from her father I took her to New Mexico where we lived together in a dear little adobe surrounded by snow. I met Nat out there. I got a tutor for Wendy, and that's where she first met Kim. I've told you about that. Still, it was hard for her to get adjusted. Divorces are miserable for children.

Whenever I am with her now, I enjoy her very much indeed--I think we enjoy one another--and I am glad that she is happy. She worked in the Peace Corps, and I was proud that she did that and loved it as much as she did.

Lage: Where did she go with the Peace Corps?

Owings: Ecuador. She was trying to build up a market of things that the natives could do to sell to America. It was just at that period that there was a tariff put on these imports. It sort of fell apart. I sent her a trunkload of things for them to work on in the arts and crafts field.

At any rate, when she got back from it, and she was back in Washington, she didn't want to part from the Peace Corps. So she worked in the Peace Corps office for a period of time. When she left that, she was given a job of teaching Spanish--she spoke Spanish well--at a high school in Washington. It was very, very difficult. Rough going. There was no order; there was knifing and disorder all the time. She became disillusioned about teaching.

At the end of the term she had to give an accounting of the attendance. The attendance seemed to be the only thing that really interested the school. She had books of attendance with records of the grades. She had been working on this so long. When the term ended she went home and left this record book locked in her closet instead of taking it home in her briefcase. The next morning she came back to find all the records were gone. That was very serious for the school. It was a disturbing end of the school year.

Lage: It's a sad comment on trying to become a teacher.

Owings: It was very sad.

Lage: When was Wendy born?

Owings: She was born in 1940.

Lage: Where did she go to school?

Owings: She graduated from Colorado College in Colorado Springs. She went one year to Mills and didn't fit in as well as I had hoped she would. She didn't really want to go back after her freshman year, so we gave her a wonderful experience, Nat and I. We sent her to Florence to learn Italian. She had always been good at languages. We took her to Greece on our boat trips around the islands. So she had opportunities to do different things with us--though she was very reticent about Nat.

After Ecuador, she went to Alamosa, Colorado. She studied a combination of sociology and anthropology, and ended by marrying Norman Osorno, a student who came from Hawaii. They came over and lived on our ranch property in the house that we had had as a rental unit. They lived there for probably a year. Their dear little son Dana was born there. Norm got a job teaching up at Española, New Mexico, which is a pretty rough and tumble town, and he had difficulty handling the students.

They had bought a house and worked on that for quite a while. This was an old adobe house. And they started a shop called the Harvest Shop. She started by beginning to have only things from Ecuador and Peru and places like that. It was that ethnic kind of thing. She had lovely things. But the difficulties of the tariffs developed, and it was easier to get things from India or Pakistan or such.

Then they moved to Albuquerque where she continued with a new Harvest Shop in Old Town. Then, alas, they were divorced, and she started working in schools and teaching and taking care of little

ones. This took up all of her time because she took the children home then. She had a high wall around her little adobe house. I gave her equipment for a play yard.

Lage: So she ran her own school?

Owings: No, more of a day-care center. These were children of working parents who had to go to work at an early hour before school began. They would bring their children to Wendy, and Wendy would first have them there and perhaps give them breakfast and do things with them. Then, they would all go to school together. Later she added to that schedule, working in the school office and teaching kindergarten. She would bring the children to her home after school and have them there until the parents picked them up. It was a tiring schedule.

Her little son, Dana, tried to be very helpful with this endeavor. It was not always easy, but she loved the children. Now she is married again, to a man she met at an archeological dig, which she always loved to do whenever she had the time to do it. There is so much archeology around that area. They both were fascinated by the same things, whether they were old bones, whether they were pieces of pottery or pictographs and things of that sort. That has become much more the pattern of her life, and they have bought a new house up on Sandia Range. I think they are happy out there. So that is nice.

Lage: So she has remained in New Mexico?

Owings: She has remained in New Mexico.

Lage: What is her last name now?

Owings: Her name is Benjamin. Her name was Osorno.

She did something quite remarkable this summer. She decided to take Dana--she herself had been in Spain several times--to Spain to meet all of his blood relatives from her divorced husband.

Lage: He was from Spain?

Owings: His father was from Spain, his mother from Portugal. He lived on the Island of Maui. They were very simple people. Norm [Norman Osorno] had received a scholarship to go to this college where Wendy met him.

Norm never had any interest in these relatives. Wendy seemed to be the only one who had any interest in Norm's relatives, and

she went off and tracked them down, first going to Barcelona, and then taking bus rides all over with a map. She had just a few little inklings of their whereabouts. So Dana met relatives--sometimes peasant people, other times, men with small businesses. It was very good. It gave Dana much more understanding of his father.

Lage: How old was he when she took him? How old is he now?

Owings: He is sixteen. He says he wants to go back. It meant a lot to him, and that is good. Some people might not want to know their bloodline but for him it was quite different, and good, a pride of understanding.

VI SAVING THINGS

[Interview 3: September 25, 1986]

San Jose Creek Beach, 1952

Riess: "Saving things." You used that expression earlier. "I was saving things by then." When you first said it I thought you meant in the sense of scraps of paper, quotes. Now I realize you mean miles of beach, or populations of animals, or trees. What was your first saving project?

Owings: Let's see now. Let me just fool around with that. Actually one of the first organized small groups that I worked with came to life because of something that had happened. And that's the way I nearly always start on anything that becomes of interest to me; I do it because a bomb has gone off right under my nose and I can't walk away from it. People click their tongues and shake their heads and keep right on going, but I can't. I have to leap right into it.

That was on Point Lobos, and I was living on lands adjoining Point Lobos at that time. I was a close neighbor. My husband, Mac, and I had just bought a house in the Carmel Highlands, having finally moved from Illinois. It was a delightfully magnificent house, looking right out over the Bird Rocks on Point Lobos, and the Gibson Beach. It was all stone and it was magnificent, and very characterful. It shaped lives. You didn't shape it, it shaped you.

At any rate, we were driving home from town one day. We often had to be away because Mac traveled a lot and I, in the beginning, traveled with him a lot. I'd been away for a few days and we were driving back and suddenly I saw on the San Jose Creek Beach, that lovely beach opposite the convent, big machinery starting to dig up the sand. They were putting down drills to bring it up to see how deep it was and figure out how much sand there was there. Well, I just about collapsed.

When I got home I called an ornithologist, Laidlaw Williams, and his wife, Abby Lou, to ask what they thought about it. Well, they didn't know what they thought, but they said I ought to talk to someone in the Point Lobos League. At that time, because we had just come there to live, I hadn't really heard about the Point Lobos League, but it entered my life with a wham. I certainly heard about it after that.

They said, "Go and see Francis Whitaker," and I said, "Where does Francis live?" They said, "Oh, up at the forge in the forest." So I went there, and here was this great big man with marvelous muscles whammering away with sparks flying--whether he was doing horseshoes or whatever he was doing. (He did this hood to the fireplace here. He's done a great deal of splendid ironwork, and he's been very proud of it because there are not many single iron blacksmiths left. And he has a strong spirit underneath, uncompromising, and becomes very indignant at things that occur.)

I asked him if he realized what was happening at San Jose Creek Beach. (He hadn't really paid attention to it because he'd been involved in other things--he's a great skier and a mountain climber, and it was summertime and he was off when this was happening.) So we drove down in his truck--it was the first time I'd ever driven in a truck!--and we stopped and parked and looked at this monstrosity, and Francis strode out to ask them what they were doing, these men. The men were just workmen there, doing what they'd been hired to do. At any rate, when we got back into the truck he said, "Well, let's stop it." I said, "Yes, let's."

That meant we had to buy the beach. And then we knew that it wasn't enough if we just bought that beach, because a development was beginning to be planned all the way over to the Carmel River mouth where they were beginning to fill the lagoon, which is a nursery, you know, for rare birds and much wildlife. And so we took a bigger bite and decided to raise the money for that. First, get it on the park schedules, and then raise the money for it. This we did.

Riess: What do you mean "get it on the park schedules"?

Owings: It had to become a state park. Newton Drury was head of the state parks at that time, and because I knew Newton, that was helpful. There are some clippings in these papers of us meeting with Drury and being photographed at Point Lobos.

Francis was always a little uppity about Drury. It was very hard for Francis to get along with people, even though for a while

he was mayor of Carmel. If someone cut a pine tree down in Carmel--of course now they are terrificly fussy about it, although they're cutting them all the time because of the further development--but if someone was cutting down a tree and Francis came and saw them, he'd force a law suit.

He also didn't want any Genista or anything non-native, an exotic. I remember walking down the road with him one day in the residential part of Carmel, and he was pulling up every Genista that came along. I said, "Francis, do you realize people just planted these here?"

Riess: What is Genista?

Owings: We have it along our highways. It's a bush with yellow blossoms, and in masses it can look very pretty, but it takes over and swallows up the natural growth. Efforts have been made, even recommended by Bill [William Penn] Mott last time he was here six months ago--he said, "See if you can get rid of the Genista." Because it's an exotic.

Riess: How did you know how to proceed on that Point Lobos issue?

Owings: Knowing someone at the top to turn to. The park director, the top man. If you turn to the bureaucrats underneath, you get negative responses, fearful responses, unsure responses. They are afraid to commit themselves and feel they shouldn't. Newton Drury was a great friend of my father's, and they worked together on Save-the-Redwoods League from the beginning, so I knew him very well.

We were wanting at that time to enlarge Point Lobos State Reserve, which was eventually done with the purchase of the Hudson property. Subsequently, after my divorce from Mac and my marriage to Nat Owings while we were living in the big stone house, we gave an acre of land and the end of Gibson Beach to Point Lobos Reserve to complete the beaches to the south.

In the meantime Newton Drury found that if a county put up money, the state would match it. (That's the way the Redwoods League usually does it. The Redwoods League puts up money for a grove, the state matches it, and the grove is bought with that money. It often doesn't match it completely, but it puts up money, and the Save-the-Redwoods League fills in the rest.)

But we got the county to say that they would match any money that we raised. I don't think Francis was too keen about raising money, and I wasn't either, but we set about raising money. We had auctions and we had all kinds of things.

Riess: How did you get that machine off the beach, first of all?

Owings: Well, the project was instigated by one of the board of supervisors, Mr. [Tom] Hudson. Mr. Hudson's grandfather, A.M. Allen by name, was the one who had originally owned the property at Point Lobos. This made Hudson feel that he had the right to mine that sand.

That sand was a special quality that was used in some particular manner that made it fairly valuable. It was a horror to think of it being removed. It was simply a horror. It was like the sand on Carmel Beach. If they'd moved down machinery and removed all the white sand of the Carmel Beach you can imagine what that would have done to the people!

Point Lobos League

Riess: And the Point Lobos League was what?

Owings: The Point Lobos League was formed quite a bit earlier. It was originally founded because they were using Point Lobos for screen sets, for movies, building up big buildings there and doing all kinds of things. Point Lobos had been through a great deal that I wrote an article about.

When I was on the Point Lobos League it was made up of the blacksmith, Francis Whitaker, and Laidlaw Williams, the bird man, and Vern Yadon, the head of the Pacific Grove Natural History Museum, and myself--and a couple of people came and went in between times. But this small group did most of the work.

It took us about a year, first to alert the public--I really didn't know any of the conservationists--and then to start to take action. In the end we had to pay $90,000--and of course now you'd have to pay much, much more now--for the lands that we bought. But with the county matching the funds, and then the state matching that, you see we didn't have to raise a great deal, but it was very painful raising what we did. We had artists contributing, and we had an auction of "Your Surplus Treasures." I worked on that with a darling little Dutch woman, Tillie Pollock, who ran an antique shop, and we tore around town and we gathered all the things and had the auction in the Girl Scout house. That was our beginning.

I'd lie awake nights trying to think of ways to raise more money. We got out a printed thing, but we didn't do it in the way

that anyone with any experience would do it, or the way that one would do it now. We did it in a small town way, but we accomplished what we set out to.

Riess: This was 1952. Was there support in the town for your effort, or opposition?

Owings: First they were astonished to find that the beach didn't belong to them. The beach belongs to them up to the high tide line--and of course one could really go to court on that. When the great high tides and storms come in at the same time, the whole beach is inundated. But that isn't the way they looked at it. They looked at it and measured it off for what we'd have to buy. But we had the backing of wonderful people, and that's where I began to meet the people of Carmel, and a very good group of Carmel people.

We had the art auction, "Your Surplus Treasures," at the Mission Ranch, and that's where I bought the first photograph Edward Weston had ever taken on Point Lobos, and I was the one who bid for that, and got it, so that was nice. (That's just a personal comment.) But people really gave things of value.

Riess: The hard workers were the three, including you, mentioned in the beginning?

Owings: Well, Laidlaw Williams was always off watching a black-shouldered kite hunting in the lagoon. It was a rare bird at that time, and I remember I was running around Carmel tearing my hair out at the roots and I'd suddenly see Laidlaw and I'd rush to him, and he'd say, "I have to get right back to my kite." It had a nest there and it was quite exciting to Laidlaw.

Laidlaw became quite an authority on the Brant cormorant, and he also worked until his death on the chestnut-backed chickadee that was in the oak woods around his house there on the slopes of the Carmel Highlands. He was going to a Point Lobos meeting the night he was killed, going over the grade to Pacific Grove. Someone came down on the wrong side and hit him square on. His paper hadn't been quite finished, which was hard because he'd worked about ten years on it.

When the developers were trying to fill in the land at the outlet of the Carmel River where the artichoke fields and reeds are, Laidlaw Williams, because he was always around there, could signal us. He was like our canary--as in the mining caverns.

Riess: A small conservation group, though.

Owings: Very small, and we never grew very large, excepting that people began to help and would help us make posters for things we were going to do. But we didn't have an organization and we didn't have a membership. Thank God! That would have been--. Because once I formed Friends of the Sea Otter with a membership, the membership took over, it became a big thing. You have a big responsibility to people who join your group and give you money for membership, and you must follow through on everything you think that they should have in return.

Riess: How many joined you helping out on the beach campaign?

Owings: Not many. Well, they helped raise money, but they didn't get behind the big push, and there were plenty of big pushes as we had to deal with Tom Hudson and with the county and with the state. Francis did a lot of that, and he was such a big guy he kind of scared them.

Riess: Did it help that you were brand new around here?

Owings: Well, I think they sort of wondered who the hell I was.

If I can find that Point Lobos thing. [looking through materials]--I'll just tell you some things about Point Lobos. I call this article "A Winter Walk on Point Lobos." (It was in our Winter 1980 Otter Raft.)

> [reading] Only foresight on the part of the few kept the rarity of Point Lobos intact for the public enjoyment after a history of twenty-three years of whaling, eight years of coal mining, and the quarrying of granite, thirty years of operating an abalone canning factory, and the drawing up of a city plan to cover most of Point Lobos with a gridiron of streets for 1000 residences.
>
> Those intrusions into what has been called 'the greatest meeting of land and water in the world' were brought to a close in 1898 through the purchase of Point Lobos by A.M. Allen. He was the grandfather of Tom Hudson, a man who valued its beauty and held it without further desecration. In 1933 the state of California purchased 400 acres of Point Lobos for a state park reserve which today has grown to 1,250 acres.

Then I went on about what we did, but I read that because I wanted you to know what they had done before that.

So the Point Lobos League, then, was founded because they were fearful of more things returning to it. The movie sets--as a child I remember being taken down and seeing a whole city there made of plywood or something that was a mining town. At any rate, that's when it formed. And the Weston boys were the ones that fought it, Edward Weston's sons. That was great, but then it died. Then we picked it up again with this beach thing. Francis was president and I was secretary and so on, and just a handful of us put the thing through.

Riess: I should have thought that living down here would have made one a conservationist, by definition.

Owings: Well, people take it for granted. They think everything they see is their birthright, you know, and they just think, "It's going to be. Here it is. Let it be this way. It's going to be this way. They don't have any right to change it."

Riess: Without really looking into what is safeguarding it?

Owings: Yes. Of course, now we've gone a long way since then, and a great many people care a great deal. Thank goodness. Although sometimes there is a backward swing.

Riess: Someone like Robinson Jeffers I would have thought would have the same concerns.

Owings: Well, I'm sure he thought about it. Except for that one instance that I told you about, I never remember him entering into any issue.

Riess: And the other poets and artists?

Owings: Well, we had wonderful artists' paintings in the sale, and of course then the artists began to get interested in it because they gave their paintings.

Riess: Did you end up the spokeswoman for all of this?

Owings: No, not really. I was just the worker. I worked all the time at it. It sounds funny, you wonder what in thunder I could have worked at, but there was a lot to work at. It's one of those things that was accomplished! And you know, not many conservation things does one accomplish. Like the otters. We accomplish this, but then it's just ongoing and ongoing. And like the lions, there's a lot of stepping backwards from all the years of work on that. But San Jose Creek Beach, or Monastery Beach as they now call it I think--

Riess: Cannot be undone.

Owings: No.

[looking at reprint of article she wrote about this issue, published in National Parks Magazine, April-June 1952. See appendix B.] It's interesting. I say here many things that I hear repeated, really the whole thing. It's sort of an average-sounding article, but when I wrote it people weren't expressing themselves in quite the same way that I did, so things have changed since then. At any rate, they're wonderful photographs, don't you think?

Riess: Yes.

Owings: That's before any of the houses were there. That's another crisis we went through, the houses being built way down near the water.

That whole struggle was a wonderful therapy for me. I mentioned that I was sick. I had had two serious operations that had given me a forced change of life at far too early an age. I was taking estrogen and pills and things and was very uneasy and jumpy--my nerves were on edge. But the minute I began to work on something and focus on something outside, totally outside myself, much bigger than myself, it was just a marvelous cure.

The Sea Lion Woman

Owings: In line with that, I used to write letters to the Monterey Peninsula Herald. I'd do it only when I felt something very, very strongly, but I'd do it. A lot of other people might feel strongly, but they didn't do it. I'd like to include two of them in here.

> [reading] Below our house in Big Sur the canyon drops steeply down into a region of shadowed solitude. This canyon is frequented by many animals and a number of deer browse the slopes and the deep walls of the running stream. Although it is rarely visited by ourselves or others, it can be viewed in part from the highway above.
>
> Two days ago my husband chose to walk down our canyon trail. Under the redwoods below our house a doe lay dead on the path, shot through the neck. She had obviously struggled along the trail into the shelter

of the redwoods where she knelt and attempted to give birth to a fawn. The doe was a perfect specimen and the little fawn, with its spotted coat and beautifully formed little head, was just seeing the light of day when its mother died. The harsh world of man into which this delicate fawn was born didn't give it a chance.

Why did this man with a gun shoot this superb little doe? Not for food. Not out of fear. Not even for a prize trophy. No, this man with a gun in his hand shot the deer for a target, a brief moment of satisfaction as he hit his mark. And that moment of man's satisfaction not only caused an animal agony and death but destroyed a future generation as well.

This little tragedy is a symbol of the havoc caused by the gun in hand, the thoughtless negative element cutting down a positive element of beauty, a doe in the spring giving birth to a fawn.

The interwoven pattern of wildlife in our Santa Lucia Mountains is a frail web of infinite value. Without wildlife our canyons and slopes will lose an intangible value and become empty and dead. What are the rest of us doing while the few are out looking for a target?

Then, this is the other letter, written in 1957, which related to the whole sea lion campaign. [Monterey Peninsula Herald, June 6, 1957, "Death of a Sea Lion."]

> From our house in the Big Sur, we look down onto a large herd of sea lions who frequent an inaccessible beach and bask in the sun and raise their young on its adjoining rocks. On a large boulder closest to our point of vision, an enormous white Steller sea lion, towering above all the others, has ruled his harem for many years. This year, five females with their young nursing at their sides, surrounded this old bull. It has been an absorbing unit of life to observe and we have watched it daily.
>
> On Saturday, June 1st at 5:00 p.m. a car stopped on the coast highway and three shots shook the air, followed by a sudden silence among the sea lions. We watched with horror as the great white Steller sea lion plunged off the rock and rolled into the waters where a cloud of red blood encircled his body. His

> end was violent as he dove and turned in the waves while his lifeblood poured out. His handsome white coat became vermillion as he battled against a force he had no power to check. Within minutes his strength was gone and he sank below the red stain on the water. We had watched a king die.
>
> The car, the man, and his gun moved on. I was strongly moved by this incident, a needless murder by a man who extinguished a life more noble than his own.

After that letter I became known as "the sea lion woman."

In March 1959 two anti-sea lion bills were introduced in the legislature, one after the other, slightly reworded, and the first one had already passed in the state senate. I think I have the little article here--[reading] "Bill to cut back sea lion herds over first hurdle." [MPH, April 8, 1959.] Appalling! But that was when I first heard about it, and when I took action. [See pp. 107a-c.]

Here is what I said on April 27, 1959, or what my Committee to Save the Sea Lions said:

[reading] "A concurrent resolution is now before the California legislature authorizing the slaughter of 75 percent of the sea lions on the California coast..." Then we urge the senate and assembly to reject this and "...in its place, to authorize the study by qualified scientists of the actual consumption of commercially salable fish by sea lions in California waters..." That was the contention, that the fish were endangered by the sea lions. Whereas, in fact, according to a Scripps study the sea lions ate the Lamprey eels, which cause havoc with the commercial fish.

But we had so little time. I wrote letters, and got lots of other letters, and got a committee put together of distinguished names, none of whom the legislature had ever heard of [laughing], but I felt it was important to have a good, strong base.

Committee to Save the Sea Lion, 1959

Riess: How did you put together your committee of well-known names? Nicholas Roosevelt, Warren Olney, Starker Leopold, Ansel Adams, Horace Albright, Samuel F.B. Morse, Laurance Rockefeller--were

STATEMENT

of the

COMMITTEE TO SAVE THE SEA LIONS

A Concurrent Resolution is now before the California legislature authorising the slaughter of 75% of the Sea Lions on the California Coast. This brutal and unjustifiable proposal has the organised support of the commercial fishing of this State, which bases its demand for the destruction of these animals on the unproved charge that they are largely responsible for the continuing decline of the fish population in California coastal waters.

To prevent this wanton slaughter of California's Sea Lions, we, the undersigned, urge all supporters of conservation and lovers of nature to request the Senate and Assembly of the State of California to reject Concurrent Resolution 46, which would make possible this senseless killing,

AND

in its place, to authorize the study by qualified scientists of the actual consumption of commercially salable fish by Sea Lions in California waters, and the respective roles of Sea Lions, commercial fishing and the pollution of streams and coastal waters in depleting the supply of such fish off California shores.

Nicholas Roosevelt	Author, retired newspaperman
Horace Albright	Former director, National Park Service, prominent conservationist
Roy Chapman Andrews	Zoologist, explorer and author
Samuel F. B. Morse	President, Del Monte Properties
Helen Crocker Russell	Civic and philanthropic organization worker
William E. Colby	Former Chairman, California State Park Commission
Ansel Adams	Prominent photographer
Mrs. Joseph Stilwell	Civic worker and widow of General Stilwell
Warren Olney, III	Former Assistant Attorney General, Washington, D. C.
Dr. A. Starker Leopold	Professor of Zoology, University of California
Mrs. Nathaniel Owings	Executive Secretary of the Committee

April 27, 1959

This was my committee — I selected them as well known name — I added mine

Will Rogers, Jr., Chairman, Margaret Owings California State Park Comm
Victor B. Scheffer, Biologist, Fish and Wildlife Services
Dr. Robert Orr, California Academy of Sciences
Dr. Robert C. Miller, Director, California Academy of Sciences
Kenneth S. Norris, Zoologist, UCLA
Alfred Barr, Jr., Director, Museum of Modern Art, New York City
Paul R. Needham, Professor of Zoology - Fisheries

AMENDED IN ASSEMBLY APRIL 30, 1959

Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 46

Introduced by Senator Slattery

March 26, 1959

REFERRED TO COMMITTEE ON FISH AND GAME

Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 46—Relative to sea lions.

WHEREAS, The sea lion population off the California coast has more than doubled since 1947, rising from a 1947 population of 8,700 to 19,700 today; and

WHEREAS, The fish resources of this State are in great danger from these predators who consume tremendous quantities of fish annually to the extreme detriment of both sport and commercial fishing; and

WHEREAS, The loss to commercial fishermen includes not only the loss of the potential resource but also the loss of fish already netted or hooked and great injury to their nets and other fishing gear; and

WHEREAS, This problem is accentuated by the fact that the salmon fishery, the decline of which is presently causing great concern, is one of the prime targets of these predators, and especially since the salmon are often destroyed at the river entrances prior to their spawning run up the rivers, so that the loss of each salmon means not only the loss of that fish but also the necessary spawners for a future supply of salmon; now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Senate of the State of California, the Assembly thereof concurring, That the Department of Fish and Game is hereby directed, pursuant to the authority granted it by Section 4500 of the Fish and Game Code, to reduce the sea lion population ~~to~~ a level ~~of not more than 5,000 mammals~~ *necessary to prevent excessive depredation; and be it further* ~~and, if necessary, to enter refuges to carry out such reduction when such entry is approved by the Fish and Game Commission; and be it further~~

Resolved, That the Secretary of the Senate is directed to transmit a copy of this resolution to the Director of the Department of Fish and Game and the Fish and Game Commission.

O

Big Sur
California
April 16, 1959

Editor
The Monterey Peninsula Herald
Monterey, California

I have often amused my friends by saying that if I could be born again I would choose to be a Sea-lion. Their love of life, their ease and grace of motion, gliding in balance with the storms and floating with ease in the swells and all in the precarious and changing world between the sea and the land! They roar and talk to one another, operating in groups yet remaining free and individual in action.

These things I admire and envy and return to and learn from!

Yet, it was such a small item in the Herald on April 8th that shattered this world

The Senate Fish and Game Committee just approved a resolution authorizing the slaughter of approximately three fourths of the California coast Sea-lions. Instigated by the Salmon Industry, the bold sweep of this death sentence proposes an "easy method" of execution. "Cheap and neat" say the California Trollers Association, "use depth bombs."

The Sea Otters, long thought to have been exterminated by the few who made their profits selling furs, have returned to our coast and enjoy protection by law. Indiscriminate killing by depth bombs or "Unlimited Shooting" could make inroads on the Sea Otter herds, easily mistaken in identity, as well as actually exterminating the Sea-lions.

Alas, these Sea-lions will die in vain. Not many more cans of salmon will be packed after they have gone for the Industry will find little perceptible difference in their haul. Scientists figure that sea-lions consume but three per cent of the total fishing take each year and further inspection of the contents of their stomachs has disclosed a diet primarily of fish with no commercial value. Look to our rivers, poluted and dammed, responsible for any dwindling of the salmon industry.

How is it that one small group of the Fishing Industry can order a mass killing that affects our entire coast? These men do not own the sea nor do they own the right to dictate an act so merciless and so self-seeking. Is it possible that readers of this paper can accept this news with a shrug of indifference?

What power has the written word? Will thoughtful people take action? This measure has not passed the <u>Assembly Committee on Fish and Game.</u> Write this Committee at State Capitol. Each letter bears weight. Write today or the voices of our coastal waters will be silent!

Thank you,

Margaret Owings

these people whom it was easy to tell, "I've got an important issue, will you just go along with it?"

Owings: Yes. Nearly all these people I knew to some extent. I see I even had Alfred Barr, the director of the Museum of Modern Art. [laughter] I'd forgotten that. That was because I'd just been with him a few days before. And of course Nicholas Roosevelt was living down here, right here. And that was when I first met Dr. Kenneth Norris, who later became a zoologist at the University of California in Santa Cruz. He became a great leader and for me a wonderful guy in my life.

Riess: Did those people do anything other than allow you to use their names?

Owings: Yes, they wrote letters. I got statements from each one, and I sent the statements to the committees, and used the statements in articles that I wrote, and so on.

The fact that I had the help of the lobbyists, the Guptas, was very important to me, because I had never even been to the state capitol, and they went up there, each one in his and her turn.

Riess: Where did you find Ruth and Kamani Gupta? How did you get to know them?

Owings: I think I'd asked around a great deal, because I certainly had never met a lobbyist consciously, and they were recommended to me. I went up to San Francisco and talked with them.

Kamani was the one who handled it in the beginning because Ruth was doing other work. They became interested in it, although they're not necessarily environmentalists, that isn't their field. I'm sure they feel environmentally proper, but that isn't their field. But he rolled up his sleeves and really went at it. He was the one who went to the hearings and spoke up.

Riess: And did you make any public appearance on this issue?

Owings: No, I didn't, which seems strange because on the next issue I was up there in Sacramento all the time.

Riess: Nat really got you started?

Owings: He gave me the strength to go at a thing. I'd be mumbling, wondering what to do.

That night, after I read about the sea lions, I cried. He said, "Now, let's not cry about it anymore, and tomorrow morning we'll begin to work." Although he was away doing other things most of the time, still he was always there, and I would turn to him for advice, or I had his strength behind me, which was a wonderful role that he played in my life.

I have some other letters from people that were helpful. I had Roy Chapman Andrews, the explorer and author. And this is where I began with Starker Leopold, too, who became a big factor in my life.

Riess: So, the bill had "cleared the hurdles" on April 8th, and it was killed twenty-one days later. That was very speedy.

Owings: Yes, I know it. Senator Slattery then introduced his second bill. He was ridiculous to think that if this bill said the beach below my house would be out of bounds, and Point Lobos would be out of bounds, that that would be all I'd want. That just made my hair stand straight up.

But thinking about writing those letters... I have this idea that the right written word and the right spoken word can just do an enormous amount to accomplish things. Rachel Carson is an example. She could do a book on the seas and life in the seas that electrified people, or made people see the sea almost in the same way the astronauts were seeing the planet [The Sea Around Us]. It was the way she did it and the words she spoke which were so incredibly strong and beautiful, and the repeats that she made --many repeat patterns that meant a great deal to her.

Silent Spring, that was something else again. It was very painful for her to do because that isn't the way she wanted to do things, but she saw that it had to be done, and so she did it. She felt still more had to be done at the time she died. That's one reason I picked up that idea of starting the Rachel Carson fund.

Riess: Well, words were what you had to offer too.

Owings: Other people were moving and doing things. I hoped to be doing things at the same time. But the words, that was my forte, or the thing I believed in.

Riess: Weren't you amazed that you were able to stop that bill? Did it give you a sense of power?

Owings: Well, it was the first time that I had to deal with the press, trying to get editorials and pictures in papers--and very few

photographs of sea lions seemed to exist anyplace in the State of California--trying to gather them, and all those efforts. Getting out cards, and trying to do the whole thing from this dining table. I knew very few people to call on, so I didn't even have any volunteers. I just did it myself. I felt I had no time at all. It was as if I was watching my wristwatch all the time.

Riess: And how did you finance it?

Owings: Just myself.

Riess: You did?

Owings: That was a nice thing, of course. Being married to Nat, I didn't have to think about that. And that's been the same with other things that I've done. I can't do that anymore.

Riess: You didn't use your Committee to Save the Sea Lion as financial backing?

Owings: No, I asked for no money.

Riess: Were you attacked in the local papers?

Owings: Oh yes, in sort of inconsequential letters. I think I cut some of them out to illustrate it. Some fishermen had the idea that sea lions were eating all of their fish, all up and down the California coast. That's the tendency, of course. It went on with the otter and everything else, that same kind of thinking.

Riess: What else did you learn from the sea lion undertaking? What if it had failed?

Owings: Oh, my God! If it had failed, then I would have really rolled up my sleeves and gone out to see when we could put another stop to it in some way. Because we would have had to stop it. The thing really that stopped it with many people was the fact that they were talking about dynamiting the sea lions. The thought that it would make the beaches unpleasant is what stopped it with many people. Isn't that incredible?

Nature Consciousness and Newspaper Consciousness

Riess: Driving down here today from distant Berkeley, I wondered how you involve people in issues when they aren't immediate to the situation.

Owings: I think there you have to present it, of course. Wonderful things have come out of television nature programs. David Suzuki has done such marvelous things. I'm not saying that he's talked about the sea lion, but he's talked about a good many things, including the otter. There's an excellent one on the otter that we just purchased.

Riess: Suzuki?

Owings: Suzuki has done some powerful nature series, including "A Planet for the Taking." He narrates them himself, just as [Robert] Redford did for the one on the condor the other night. I thought he did it very well. The facts, of course, were all brought to Redford, but he presented it well, just as he presented the one on the wolves very well. But Suzuki obviously has a very scientific mind and easily grasps and understands things. Not that Redford isn't good at that too, but he's not trained in the scientific field. He teaches people.

We didn't have anything like that then. We didn't have television then. So I had to go to papers and editors. I went to see editors; Nat always told me to go to the top of everything, so I'd go to the editors. That was helpful, and it's a thing that I've continued to use. It's better to do that than to talk to those who are the aides or the underlings and have it not really passed on, but just be checked off. There's no point.

Riess: Who were the editors you felt were most important?

Owings: Well, of course, first the Monterey Peninsula Herald. I had great help, great help. That was marvelous. Ed Kennedy was the man's name who backed me on everything I did and gave me front page and wrote editorials up and down the front page on the things that I was working on. He's no longer alive, so it's a bit different now.

The Sacramento Bee was helpful on the lion. I found a letter from Eleanor McClatchy [McClatchy family owns the Bee] today.

On the San Francisco Chronicle there was Harold Gilliam, who has the column in the Sunday edition. On the Chronicle I also used Charles McCabe. Charles McCabe helped me a great deal, and in part it was because no one expected it from him.

Riess: Did the newspaper people ask you to give them a few paragraphs each time? In other words, were you writing it behind the scenes?

Owings: Sometimes I wrote things behind the scenes. But I find that a good reporter likes to write his own thing, you know, with some quotes from the person. I'm in the act of doing that right now about Caltrans cutting into a grove of redwoods and sycamores at the entrance to the Big Sur valley. So I'm back at it again.

Riess: I was asking you, "What would you have done if the sea lion killing bill had passed."

Owings: Well, I would have learned an awful lot then. I mean, I would really begin to learn.

Then Nat, if he sees himself being defeated in something, or watches me, because I was part of him, being defeated in something, he would have rolled up his sleeves and we would have stood on our heads to stop it. If I'd just been a feeble little woman living in a little house and just bobbing along, I probably wouldn't have been able to stop it, but I think we could have stopped it.

Riess: Well, I should think so. That's not to be minimized, that boost you must have gotten from him. Did he read over your material?

Owings: No, Nat hardly ever read it over. Once in a while I read something to him that I'd written, and sometimes he came out with a very good critique. Otherwise, I did it all, my writing stuff I did on my own. Now I'm on my own again.

North American Wildlife Conference, 1972

Owings: When I rush to defend a form of wildlife, whether it's a mountain lion or a sea lion or a sea otter or a redwood tree, there are those who say, "Oh, I suppose you're against shooting." The National Rifle Association people always say, of course, "Well, you're trying to take our guns away from us."

I was invited by the National Audubon Society--Charles Callison and Roland Clement and Carl Buchheister, the man who was president, decided that I was the one to go down and represent them at the 37th North American Wildlife and Natural Resource Conference in Mexico City. The whole title of that part of the conference was "Preservation: Peril or Panacea." I was the only woman speaker, and my speech made many of them very angry. They suspected that I wasn't a hunter, and the whole thing is financed by the National Rifle Association.

Riess: You mean this wildlife conference was organized by the NRA?

Owings: Yes.

I put this speech together. ["A Commitment in Defense of Natural Systems," 1972. See appendix.] I did just what I wanted to do. But I thought I better check it because I couldn't be in error about things, and I wanted to know what others would think about it, so I gave it to Starker Leopold to read. I thought whatever it is, I know my opinion is not going to be his, but if it has flaws, if I had said things that were just inaccurate, I wanted to know about those things and change them.

He was amused at the paper because he knew how mad it would make everyone. But he said, "No, that's the way you feel and it's all right. What you've said is right." He read it and made a few suggestions, but he let me say what I wanted to say. He didn't say, "You can't do this, Margaret," or, "You can't say that."

Then I sent it to Durwood Allen and he said, "It's okay, I'll be glad to have you say these things, Margaret. They need it." He went over it and changed a couple of words in it.

Riess: Why did Audubon send you?

Owings: I don't know why. I had known them, of course. I'd already done the mountain lion bounty.

Riess: They knew what you were up against, in terms of the attitudes that you would encounter there?

Owings: Yes.

The review of the whole conference came out in book form afterwards, and it was damning of me. Both Callison and Durwood Allen and a number of other scientists wrote to me afterwards and said, "I'm sorry about"--and gave the name of that man--"but that's his attitude." "They're very much afraid that guns will be taken from them and they won't be able to hunt and shoot and so on."

Riess: "That man" was Ray Arnett?

Owings: No, he was not "that man" who wrote the review. Ray Arnett is the man who was the director of the [California Department of] Fish and Game [under Ronald Reagan], and he was on the board of the National Wildlife Federation. His main pleasure was the killing of animals, literally, literally. I mean, he'd be flown up to get

his polar bear in the wintertime. He would do everything you could think of doing. And was terribly on the defensive about it.

Riess: But was Audubon's position not very clear about some of those things in the early seventies?

Owings: No, they were clear enough. But they didn't publish my paper. Callison said he wanted it published in the magazine, and Les Line, who is the editor, decided against it. I guess he decided that it would cause too much of a furor and they'd probably lose some of their members. That is my only interpretation of that.

I said here in the beginning of it [reading] "I'm oriented toward the preservation of wildlife rather than toward its exploitation for commercial gain, sport hunting for recreation, and the ingrown theory that wildlife is useless unless used. I'm concerned about the gratification of our greed." Then I go on to other things, using examples, and speaking about the mountain lion in particular because that's what I was working on at the time.

Riess: So, what exactly happened when you delivered the speech in Mexico City?

Owings: I'll tell you some of the circumstances, such as when I rose to speak. It was a very large hall, there must have been five or six hundred people there, almost completely men, and certainly I was the only woman to speak.

I went to the podium and looked down on these faces, and I saw in the front row Arnett. I saw next to him Nat Reed. There were all the prime people who were going to do something or say something. There were several others whom I knew in African Wildlife Leadership who were there who were not my friends. Nat Reed is my friend, but the others weren't.

So I began, and I began by telling the incident of taking my cocker spaniel, Jenny, up along the ridge road and having the Department of Agriculture come by in its truck. He said, "Pick up that dog." I grabbed for Jenny. I was so innocent at that time about what was going on. I said, "Why?" as I was holding her. The man said, "We have cyanide guns planted all along here, and dogs, of course, will eat it. It will kill them instantly."

I began to really think about this. After that I called the Department of Agriculture in Salinas. (This was in the beginning, before they grew to know me.) They wrote me out exactly what I wanted to know at that moment.

Riess: What year was this?

Owings: This was 1965, before that Mexican conference.

The letter was dated November but went back to April: "Three days, no catch this period." May: "Five days, during this period, the catch was eight coyotes, four bobcats, three foxes, one badger, eight raccoons, three skunks, and one opossum."

[reading] I said to him, "Why are you killing these animals?" He said, "Because we just planted wild turkeys up there for the hunters, and these are animals that might attack the turkey, especially, of course, the coyote."

Then I asked about mountain lions, and he said, "We do not trap mountain lions." But I obtained the following figures from the auditor as to the bounty (this is just in this county right here): In 1960 and 1961 there were eleven lions killed; in 1961-1962 twelve lions killed; in 1962-1963 eight lions killed; in 1963-1964 thirteen lions killed.

[reading] "In 1964 was around the time I was getting things stopped. They only killed three. But that was the way things were working right up here, which is extraordinary."

Riess: And how did the wildlife conference people respond?

Owings: Arnett took everything personally. Nat Reed described Arnett to me afterwards. He said, "First when you began talking up there about the animals that were killed, Arnett's face turned very red. Then as you went on from one animal to another you asked for it"--which I did, of course--"and when you got to the lions he became very red."

"Then," Reed said, "I looked over and he was absolutely white. He was so angry, Margaret, that he was frozen with rage."

The minute I was through he [Arnett] got up, just stalked out of the room and up the hall. Everyone in the room was sitting down. He ran into a man by the name of Tennyson who served on the African Wildlife Leadership who was one of his [Arnett's] friends. Tennyson told me later what he said. He said, "That woman, I could give her a sock in the jaw!"

Riess: And the rest of the audience?

Owings: I got some nice letters from those who felt I needed it. The man who reviews these conferences that occur, telling them how fine they are and so on, when he came to me he was quite critical. That was when I got letters from Durwood Allen and apologies.

Riess: Was the Audubon Society involved in the conference in any other way?

Owings: No.

Riess: You were the only conservationist viewpoint?

Owings: Yes. Well, David Brower was there, and I went and had dinner with David and Anne afterwards. So yes, there were a few other conservationists.

Riess: But what a challenge!

Owings: It was. I didn't hold it back. I didn't see any reason to hold it back.

Starker Leopold

Riess: Did you have many dealings with Starker Leopold?

Owings: Oh yes, because I began to work with him on the mountain lion.

Riess: Did he share your views?

Owings: He didn't, totally. I felt we became very good friends. At first, however, when I asked him to serve on the bounty committee, he was working on a federal predator control study, and he thought it probably wouldn't be right to serve on this committee. At any rate, he did not serve then, but it bothered him that he hadn't served.

Then when I tried to introduce a moratorium [on killing the mountain lion] he wasn't sure that he was ready to do so. And he came in the room--we were all in the room up at the state senate--and his eyes fell on me. I looked at him. He told me afterwards he almost felt as if he was going to faint. He, in the end, turned and said, "Let's make this if dogs are used for practice hunting a lion without any kill, and only photography is used for the shot, I'll go along with this."

We weren't sure about the dogs, because there were real questions about the dogs picking up the scent of a female lion with cubs, kits. That often causes trouble, if they drive the cats too far away.

However, that was so much better than what they had had. Before that they had a period in which they thought there were only 600 lions. I have the number of permits they sold, 6000 or so. You could kill a lion night or day, female or kitten. You could do anything. The main thing they asked is that you reported to them what you did. That's all. They wanted the numbers. [See pp. 203-226 for more on efforts to preserve the mountain lion.]

VII STATE PARK COMMISSION, 1963-1969

The Highway Through the Redwoods

Riess: You were on the State Park Commission from 1963 to 1969. How did you become a commissioner?

Owings: Fred Farr was the senator to whom I had made my request that he write the bill to remove the mountain lion bounty, so that he found himself working with me rather closely, and I with him. After we accomplished that--I was up in Sacramento a great deal at that point, so that he was aware of me and I was aware of Sacramento--he suggested to [Governor] Pat Brown that he consider me to replace a retiring park commissioner.

Pat Brown, I think, had other ideas. Fred called around to different people, and Adlai Stevenson wrote a very nice letter, and people like that wrote nice letters about why I should be a commissioner. Pat Brown then suddenly decided I should be the commissioner. That was how it came about, in July of 1963.

I was just noticing that in the San Francisco Examiner at that time it said, "A Crusader Named to Park Board." I haven't seen that for a long time, and it amuses me quite a bit. "Crusader!" It's true that I take everything seriously when I begin it.

I was very conscientious. I didn't travel very much. I tried to arrange my time so that during those redwood hearings I was around all the time; just all the time I paid attention to it. For me it wasn't a once-a-month meeting, it was just continual work, because I felt very strongly about it, and when I feel very strongly about a thing, then it's not anything I can let go or want to let go.

Riess: What was the first issue that came before the commission when you joined them?

Owings: I got involved with the redwoods in a fighting manner when they wanted to cut a freeway right through the alluvial flats where the

largest redwoods were, and these were already state park lands. I fought that. I was head of that redwood part, that was my chief responsibility. This was before Reagan came in. Pat Brown was fairly responsive.

(We worked very hard on Pat Brown because they also were going to put a freeway along the Big Sur Road here, which would have blasted the mountains and filled the canyons! So the two of us, Nat and I, were both fighting. Our enemies at that point were the Highway Commission and those who worked on it.)

I went to hearings up in Sacramento for a long, long time, and finally we got an alternate route going up high. It was 2.8 miles longer than the road in the alluvial flats, and that was enough. The truck companies didn't like it because they had to shift gears.

Then they thought we were stopping their redwood cutting, so the owners of big lumber barges coming into Crescent City came up to fight us, because they thought we were curtailing their business--and we weren't because they had such a supply of redwood. There's always someone crying out without seeing the full picture.

The points I made were used again and again, and I felt actually that I had strengthened the attitude of mind about the damage done by these freeways, and how misleading the trees were on either side of these roads as they stood now, because they were really rather thin. (They were cutting on the other side, and people didn't know it. They thought this was just a vast area.)

I took to flying over the area, and really learned the state of it. Martin Litton, of dory fame [owner of Grand Canyon Dories], got involved. Not with Save-the-Redwoods, because he was always critical of the Save-the-Redwoods League because he's an irascible kind of a guy. But he got involved in trying to keep the freeways out. I sort of was his right-hand person, and together we went up to see the governor and we did many things. We had national television programs up there in a magnificent grove. I spoke on one of them, and other people from the Sierra Club spoke. I have pictures from that.

The Commission, and Fellow Commissioners

Owings: The people who nominated me as commissioner knew my association with the Save-the-Redwoods League. The other commissioners weren't particularly interested in redwoods, although when they'd go up there they'd look at them. Later [Harry E. Sokolov, whom

Reagan appointed to the commission because he brought money from --who was it? Zanuck? The big Hollywood--

Riess: Darryl Zanuck?

Owings: Yes. I always envision him [Sokolov] as coming with a silver-plated tray holding money on it, as the contribution, and coming into Reagan's office. Reagan said to him--and this actually happened, not the tray thing, but that's the way I think of it--Reagan said to him, "What do you want?" He said, "Well, what have you got?" Reagan looked at a list and named several things. None of them were interesting to Sokolov.

They'd just changed the name of the Parks Commission to Parks and Recreation Commission. Reagan read that off, and Sokolov said, "Well, that's the one I want, because I'm connected with recreation." [laughter] He was at that point working on some movie about the Boston Strangler! Oh sure, recreation!

At any rate, Sokolov said, "I've got to be chairman." (I know Sokolov's whole life because he just talked his life right through to me over the years that we were together.) They said, "No, the chairman is appointed by the commission itself." That disturbed both Sokolov and Reagan. Reagan wanted to make a change so that he could put Sokolov in as the chairman.

Can you conceive of a man as chairman without <u>anything</u> to do with the environment, no knowledge whatsoever? He didn't know what a redwood tree was. We went up together and I showed him his first redwood. We went through the grove and then I talked to him about everything. Then Reagan put <u>him</u> [Sokolov] in charge of the redwoods and removed me from that redwoods issue. And after those first two years of Reagan's administration, when I thought I'd accomplished all I could, I resigned. But I kept on talking, and kept on dealing with the newspapers about it.

Riess: When you first came in under Brown, the only other commissioner whose name I knew was Harold Zellerbach.

Owings: Yes. [laughing] Harold Zellerbach and I were always like this. Absolutely like this. [gestures to indicate opposite views]

Riess: He was from the forest industry.

Owings: Yes.

Riess: Did everyone have some sort of vested interest connection?

Owings: I think it was also monetary. I think that was a big factor with Harold. I told him it was a conflict of interest for him to have an opinion about cutting redwood trees down when he had that big

paper mill up there, and he didn't like it very well, but he would say, "All right, I won't vote." But then he'd pipe up in the meetings with these negative things that were incredible.

One time I gave in to him on something, if he would vote for something for me. You know, this is what politicians often do. I only did this once in all the time. I had to give in to something that meant something to me; it didn't mean everything to me, but I didn't approve of it. "Yes, he'd agree to do that." Then he failed me. He voted against the issue when it came up, an issue that I wanted that meant a lot to me. So.

Riess: From what you knew about the commission when you first went on, did you expect that it would be loaded, or a neutral situation where intelligent people made good decisions?

Owings: I hadn't really given it much thought. We had some extraordinary characters on it. I'd have to look at the list again.

Riess: Was George Fleharty on the commission with you?

Owings: Yes, I think he was from Fresno, or like that. And then Alfred Stern, and Harold Zellerbach, and Sterling Cramer. He was head of the concessions at Yosemite. He was a good man, he stood for good things. And then this other man [looking at a photograph] was the editor of a paper down in San Diego, and his name has escaped me. And then John Elsbach with a red carnation in his lapel.

Riess: I'd like you to respond to some things that Harold Zellerbach has said in his oral history about the State Parks Commission. For instance, he said that Charles DeTurk, the department director, was "a good conservationist and a good teacher, but a very bad administrator."[1]

Owings: I think he's right there. He was a very decent guy, a love of a man, but he was a poor administrator, and so the deputy director, Edward Dolder, really had to do everything to voice things and make decisions.

Riess: Zellerbach said it took more than two years to convince Pat Brown that a new director was needed, and that in the meantime the commissioners were doing practically all the director's work.

Owings: That's ridiculous. That <u>is</u> ridiculous. And besides, DeTurk died.

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[1]Harold L. Zellerbach, <u>Art, Business, and Public Life in San Francisco</u>, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1978.

Riess: And that the lack of funds for the parks was because the department of finance didn't trust DeTurk, who could never say no.

Owings: It's interesting that he focused so much on DeTurk.

Riess: When you came in it was prior to a major bond issue.

Owings: Yes, and we went through a whole bond issue period. That was the first time I ever was involved with lobbyists, strong political lobbyists trying to win us over by drinks, and at one time a very elaborate dinner in Los Angeles.

I wanted money given to the redwoods, which we needed so much at that time; I had picked out a few things I thought park money should go to. The L.A. lobbyist was just a caricature of what one imagines a lobbyist might be. He opposed money for the redwoods and any natural reserves. I was in the middle of eating my dinner, and one of the commissioners said, "This is from so-and-so," this lobbyist, "he's giving us this dinner." I remember I stopped chewing the food and I put down my fork and I said, "I'm not taking another bite." I can't stand to take anything from anyone in relation to decisions that have to be made, and owe anyone anything.

Riess: A point that Zellerbach brings up is that he didn't use the commission as a way to take vacations, implying that there might have been people who took junkets and took their families along on State Park Commission business?

Owings: I never heard of it. Never heard of it. A couple of them brought their wives to meetings when we went off places, but I wouldn't have called that a vacation. I wouldn't have said that. We had our expenses paid. That's all we got from the commission.

Riess: When Zellerbach went on the commission the legislature had just stripped it of all of its powers, which were only advisory anyway, apparently to get back at Joe Knowland. Zellerbach spearheaded a move to get the State Park Commission's powers back.

Owings: Yes, it was right after that that I came in. He wasn't working on that at the time, but they were talking about it beforehand. Previously we had had the whole commission come down here--we were trying to arrange for the Molera Park--and I gave them lunch. It was the first time that I met them, and Nat met them too.

I think we regained some of the powers, but not as much as the commission had had in the past. Power has its good and its bad points; it could be very dangerous. The California Coastal Commission today is filled with people who are for development along the coast, and they just need one more appointment and we've lost anything we gained.

Riess: Was there protocol about the commission speaking publicly, or to the legislature?

Owings: We didn't meet before legislative committees very often. We did some, but not as a commission. When I was involved with the redwoods I was meeting all the time before legislators, and before the lumbermen, and before the governments in those counties to the north.

The Brown Act said the commission couldn't meet without other people present. Sometimes we would march in to have dinner someplace after commission meetings, and there was always a question about whether we had to have someone else there.

Four Illusions Speech, January 1964

Riess: You must have had an uphill battle, what with your views and being a woman.

Owings: Yes, one of the biggest battles was with the State Highway Commission, which favored routing a major freeway through state park redwoods which included the handsomest groves growing in the alluvial flats.

I made a statement in Sacramento at the joint meeting of the Park Commission and the Highway Commission on January 24, 1964. I'd like to give a brief review of what I said in this statement, which I called "Four Illusions" [see facing page]:

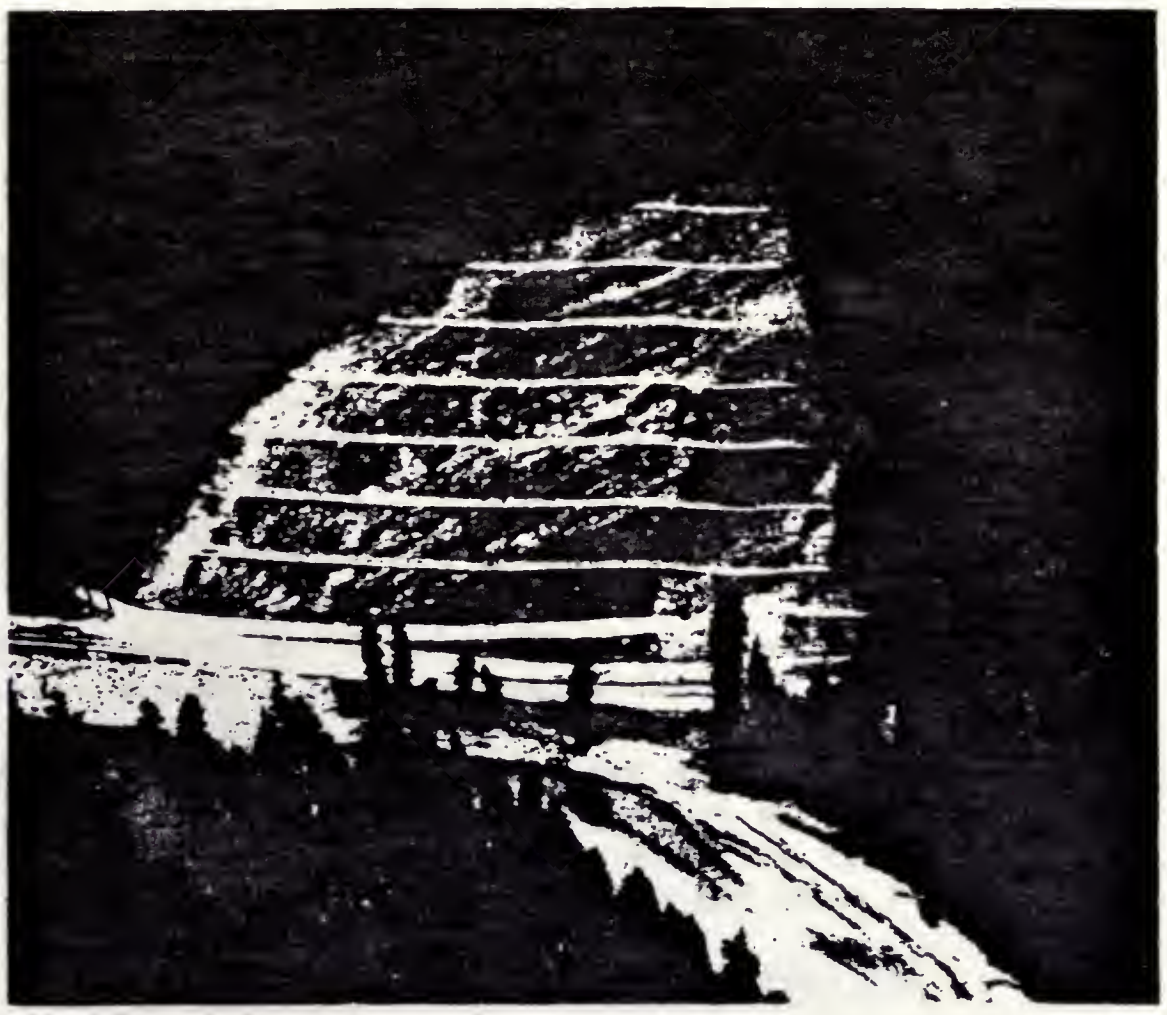
The first illusion for the public was the depth of the virgin forest, often just facades with cut timber behind.

The second illusion related to the damage caused by freeways cut through these forests. More than visual damage, it's the alteration of the native environment filled with moisture and natural drainage. Freeways cut daylight areas through deep shadowed groves and destroy the adjacent life zones. Wind-tunnels are introduced and root structures, already disturbed, can topple the trees at the first storm.

The third illusion relates to the traveling tourist, using this freeway to take him to these parks. If his objective is obliterated, he will see a well-groomed freeway but not the rare and beautiful forest.

And the last illusion violates a trust. Redwood parks were acquired through donations from thousands of citizens with the

The Division of Highways caption for this photograph reads as follows: "View of the famous high cut near the Federation of Women's Clubs Grove in the Humboldt Redwood State Park. The uppermost part of the cut is 480 feet above the roadbed. South Fork Eel River is in the foreground."



Four Illusions about Redwoods

By Margaret Owings

Statement by State Park Commissioner Margaret Owings at the joint meeting of the State Park Commission and the State Highway Commission in Sacramento, California —January 24, 1964.

As I see it, there are four illusions connected with our state park redwoods through which this major freeway is being routed.

There is, for the public, an illusion of depth to the virgin forest along these narrow roadside strips—façades, alas, easily fractured.

Three-quarters of our original redwood stand are *gone*. One-quarter remains. Of this, 75,000 acres are in park land. From the remaining privately owned land, about a billion board feet are harvested each year. This means, that in a dozen years or so, *no redwoods will be left except those in state hands*. This cutting will include many magnificent groves that the public is under the illusion already belong to the state. This is the first illusion—the relatively small areas of redwoods in park hands.

The second illusion relates to the damage caused by freeways cut through these circumscribed areas.

First, there is the visible damage of the cut itself and the felling of the giant trees. The public is primarily aware of this. This is not an illusion.

But there is more damage, not immediately discernible—the alteration of the native environment. Sequoia sempervirens are one of the few trees that make their own environment, their own life zone, in which moisture is held, ferns and Oxalis propagate, and small streams are tempered and directed by root structures.

Freeways block these natural drainages, develop erosion, cut daylight areas through deep shadowed groves and destroy the adjacent life-zones. Wind-tunnels are introduced through formerly protected confines, and bordering trees, their root structures already disturbed, are toppled at the first storm. For example, redwoods along the South Fork of the Eel River are doomed to die from the effects of freeway construction *adjacent to them*.

As it is now, many of the smaller redwood parks are too small to survive. With lumbering and the despoilage of their life-zone up to the very inch of their boundaries, a block of trees cannot long withstand the elements and drainage that cut-over lands present. To these groves, the addition of freeway construction will spell annihilation.

And then, there is damage in the form of *noise*. Passing trucks and cars echoing through the woods disturb the highest aesthetic quality that the visitor seeks in a grove. As Brooks Atkinson recently wrote in his column:

"The Redwoods are a spiritual resource. They belong to a self-contained world that is *silent, detached, lofty* and *overwhelming*."

The third illusion also relates to the freeways. A highway spokesman says: "Our interest is in the traveling public and providing a safe highway that will beautify the country." This is a good statement, yet freeways, cut through redwood parks, will cancel these objectives. The traveling tourist is using the freeway to take him to these parks. If his objective is obliterated, he will see a well-groomed freeway but not the beautiful country.

A recent editorial in the *Humboldt Beacon* said: "Our redwood parks will be this county's *greatest asset* in the decades to come. *Any further loss of trees in this area would be a stark tragedy*. They must be protected—and we are confident that the engineers of the State Division of Highways are able enough to provide the routes which will give this protection."

And the last illusion violates a *trust*. Redwoods, more than any parklands in the nation, were acquired through donations from thousands of citizens—people who cared. The Save-the-Redwoods League has collected $10½ million, which, in turn, have been matched by state funds. *These gifts have been made under the illusion that these redwood groves would be preserved in perpetuity from all types of destruction, including the intrusion of freeways.*

Nowadays, we remake our landscapes. We remove our hills, we redirect our rivers, we fill our bays. But the redwoods are a landscape that cannot be remade.

I would like to see an unbroken policy established by the state of California: *That no more virgin redwoods in state parks be cut down for freeways*

The issue was The cutting of the finest 1964 –
State Park redwoods for a freeway for trucking our =

understanding that they would be preserved in perpetuity from all types of destruction, including the intrusion of freeways.

[Alfred J.] Stern was chairman at the time. This was a meeting with all the highway people and ourselves and a big audience of people keenly interested in the issue up in some hall in Sacramento. I knew it was a time that one should speak up and speak well, and so I put that together. The parks people had no plans of anything they were going to say or do.

No one asked me to do it, but I said, "I would like to say a few words." I had stayed home a few days and worked out that speech, and I said "a few words." Stern, who was chairman, said, "Who do you think you are, Margaret, when you get up in the hall? Do you think you're Caesar in the Forum?" I mean, he was really angry with me. I said, "No, I'm saying exactly what the facts are as I see them, and no one on our side was there to say them."

Riess: Did they feel that they were being lectured to? What does the reference to Caesar mean?

Owings: Well, I was talking really to the highway people and to the audience who consisted of a lot of people in the lumber business, a whole bunch of them.

Riess: And did Stern feel that the role of the park commissioner was to be neutral?

Owings: No, because it wasn't to be that way. It was to hear these two commissions against one another, their different points of view.

Riess: How was the meeting conducted?

Owings: I'm just trying to remember who conducted it. [reading] "Met in joint session, 1964."

It had an audience of about a hundred citizens, plus all the staffs. I'm not able to tell you what the format was. As I recall, the highway people began to talk first. They had all their highway points. It was to serve the highway system.

Riess: And what was Stern's idea of how to respond?

Owings: He said a few things, but he didn't--you have to be awfully strong about things and get people aware of things, details.

Riess: "Four Illusions" is a memorable title.

Owings: Well, I didn't think of calling it "Illusions" until I'd finished, and then it suddenly occurred to me that, although maybe I named them as I went along, they were illusions for the public.

Riess: Did you get a lot of press coverage on that?

Owings: Yes, and Dave Brower came to me and wanted me to speak to the Commonwealth Club, but I was busy that day, so I didn't. I was a little afraid they might ask me questions, and that frightened me, so I didn't. But it was published many times in different places. I was glad I went to the trouble of doing it.

Riess: Stern was also voicing a feeling that you were some kind of a nervy, pushy woman?

Owings: It irritated him that someone would--he hadn't thought of working something out in his mind ahead of time. He had no papers, he had nothing to present. So the result would be just retort-to.

Riess: But if none of the rest of them really felt as strongly as you did, then that's exactly the position they occupied, settling for whatever and then going on with their lives.

Owings: Yes, and it was my total life. My life was it. To lose a thing or to fail in a thing was losing something of my life. None of them felt that way.

Riess: Did they respect that?

Owings: Sometimes they did, and then sometimes, just as that Stern remark, no. I did it also several other times on redwood issues. I went to Washington once during the [President Lyndon B.] Johnson regime, when Lady Bird was starting the beautification thing. I said I'd go as an errand girl, so to speak.

Of course, everything came up during that time. At a governor's conference down in Los Angeles I prepared speeches. But none of the others did.

Riess: I also came across your testimony to the Senate Fact Finding Committee on Natural Resources at a hearing titled "State Parks vs. Freeway Construction and Establishing Parkways in Highway Development." [Dec. 16th and 17th, 1964.]

Owings: Yes, Fleharty and I represented the Parks Commission, and two men represented the Highway Commission. I had them all here to lunch. One of them was an undertaker in Fresno and he was on the Highway Commission. He came across from Fresno and drove up the coast road. He had a terrible fear of heights, turned green at the feeling of heights. When he got to the house he was pale white or green, and he said, "We certainly are going to have to do that road over." [laughs] This is, of course, the kind of thing that I turn pale at.

Riess: You and Fleharty were there for parks. Nat was also at that meeting, and Edgar Wayburn of the Sierra Club. You labeled it in the archives your "best testimony." I would like to hear more about it.

Owings: [laughing] Well, I prefer the speech that I gave in front of all the highway people, the "Four Illusions." I had forgotten that I had earlier decided this was my "best testimony."

Riess: The Monterey Peninsula Herald was "proud" of your presentation. The Parks Commission was "delighted and dazed" at the successful outcome of it. And Fleharty was quoted as declaring that you should receive the major credit because of your perseverance and dedication.

Owings: Fleharty was very nice to have said that; I appreciate it. As I've sort of explained, whereas most of the commissioners went home after the commission meetings and didn't do anything with their papers, just put them in their pockets until the next meeting, I was very conscientious about my whole job as a commissioner. It was the main thing I was working on, my main thing, and within that framework the main thing I was working on was the redwoods.

The others would pass judgment on things and have all kinds of little feelings about things. We were a strange group, of course, because after you've met with people for a year or so you begin to know them, and you know just how they're going to vote, too. That's the way it is, I guess, with Congress and the Senate and everything else.

The Highway Across Emerald Bay

Riess: To what other issues during your years on the State Parks Commission did you bring as much passion?

Owings: Bliss State Park was another highway battle, and I got very worked up about that. They were going to cut across Emerald Bay. And it wasn't as if they were just going to put a bridge across Emerald Bay; they'd have to blast out on either side. Some of the loveliest junipers, just beautiful stuff, they would have to blast the whole thing out to carry that road straight through, so that people wouldn't have to go down and around.

Riess: You could say that you stopped that?

Owings: No, I could say that I was a party to stopping that. I found a thing that I said about it. [looks through papers] I made a trip

to Emerald Bay and Lake Tahoe to review the proposed route of Highway 89, and I just pointed out--I wrote all the facts down. Eighteen hundred acres of state park lands bordering Lake Tahoe. Then I described how it was when coming from the south and then crossing the mouth of Emerald Bay into Bliss Park on the north side of Emerald Bay. "Where 168 campsites are used to overflowing capacity," those would have been cut out completely.

> [reading] The proposed highway would literally ravage the magnificent rocky shoreline in the vicinity of Emerald Bay entrance, and then would move higher to divide the camping area into two separate entities. It would intrude through the nature walk area, the rock formations, and the magnificent stands of trees. In short, the guise in which the park was established would be in good part destroyed.

Anyway, I wrote it up and talked it up, and so on.

Montana De Oro

Owings: I felt we accomplished a number of things during the time that I served on the commission. We stopped a number of things that were bad, and we introduced and were helping to back a number of things that were good. We established some new parks, like Montana de Oro to the south.

I would often come in on the side issues. Unrelated. At Montana de Oro I went down there to find out that they were spraying it with 1080 poison to kill all the squirrels, because "there were too many squirrels." They thought it would be better to have a park without the squirrels in it, without doing any analysis of the chain reaction of 1080 poison and what would happen to the owls and the hawks and all the animals that would catch these squirrels as they died.

It was the Department of Agriculture that moved in on this particular point. I, with Ian McMillan, fought the 1080 poison battle very hard. I think we got it stopped there. All the little poisoned grains were dyed turquoise, and they thought that would cause people not to pick them up, or children not to pick them, up, which was unbelievable. The reasoning was just about as sound as that. I went down there and saw it, saw the grains. As a small child you would immediately pick them up, and you could put them very easily into your mouth. Absolute poison.

At any rate, we did many more things, and after the bond act we acquired beaches. Those were the big battles. I saw on

television the other day one of those beaches down there near Camp Pendleton where they had a solid mass of people, you know, and they couldn't control it at all. It was like a mass of cattle, absolutely solid, the whole beach. Not people stretched out, because there'd be no place to stretch out; they'd all be standing. They got out of hand and the police had to come in. It was hilarious. On national news. I thought, "My god, that's one of the beaches we got when I was on the commission." Obviously it was a huge success!

Riess: In one of your papers you bring up the question, but you don't resolve it for yourself, of how to plan the use of parks, whether to concentrate the facilities in one place or whether to disperse them throughout the park, thereby ruining the total environment.

Owings: Yosemite was the burning example at that time--of course it's a national park rather than state. I was up in Yosemite with Sterling Cramer, a Parks Commissioner who was also a concession administrator in Yosemite Valley under the National Park Service. Sterling was a good man and we saw things alike in most instances.

I was standing beside him being fascinated with the network of tent life under the trees on the valley floor. He didn't say anything for a while, then he said, "They figure that if one studies this maze with enough care a person can cut just one rope and the total tent community will fall flat on the ground." [laughter]

I believe that people should be assigned to certain areas, if they are going to camp. Then they can walk during the daytime, whether it's up a river, or along a shore, or up a mountain. Perhaps they can have little clutches, such as at Pfeiffer Big Sur. I'm always fascinated how some people really seem to enjoy having neighbors. And all playing radios loudly. I tried to pass a law that they had to stop playing their radios at night after ten or something like that. [laughs] You couldn't say anything about the noise before that. But little details like that would come up.

William Penn Mott

Owings: I felt that I worked very well with Bill Mott. He was the one who went to the governor and asked that I specifically be held on the commission when the change of governors came about. Reagan didn't want me on. I recently had a letter from Mott in which he said, "You were the one I leaned upon the most." I was glad to play that role, because I believed in what he was doing and thought he

was doing a beautiful job of it. He had a way of holding people together and not making people angry, which is a blessing.

Riess: How do you think he does that?

Owings: He doesn't quickly snap his mind closed to an idea that happens to be contrary to his. He listens to it, and looks intelligently and interestedly at the person who is making the suggestion. And then he'll say, "Well--" and begin to let his mind turn, and words come out that take in an understanding of what that person is trying to say and then bring in the point that he has to say. Whereas some people just come along "Bang!" and "This is the way it should be!"

Riess: How did you and he work particularly?

Owings: I followed very closely all the things that we were working on and kept in touch with him a lot between meetings. We only once had a disagreement, and it was a very firm disagreement. It was about the Fish and Game Commission. They had decided that all recreation areas could be opened up for hunting. Usually a state recreation area had, as the name suggests, more camps, more this and that, things to serve the public in a camping manner. I didn't favor opening up recreation areas for hunting at all because of my feelings about wildlife and because my feelings are not exactly friendly towards guns.

The Fish and Game Commission and the State Parks Commission had to okay this in a large park along the Colorado River, the part that comes between Arizona and California. (I went down there a number of times, but it's been a while since we did it.) So I went down, just to see what kind of people were there. They were families, it was all family things, because it was flattish land with beachy bits on the edge of the river, and desert plants. It was a popular recreation area, and it was good for it to have that title. To bring in hunting, if you can conceive of it, I felt that it was terrible not only for the wildlife but also for the people and the children.

I just was deeply opposed to this, but I lost. So, it's now a hunting area. That is the only time Bill Mott and I ever disagreed.

Riess: In general, would the commission go with the director?

Owings: Yes, mostly. But sometimes not to back him up and help him, because the commission doesn't just say "Yes" or "No." After a project has been presented on maps, or we've gone down to see the place, it needs input from the commissioners. A commission should be able to give ideas, whether they are contrary or favoring. That should be their role.

Riess: Were selected situations given to you, or was everything of a certain magnitude brought before the commission? Every acquisition, for instance?

Owings: Yes, any acquisition. But my special job was to write letters to all the people where a gift was given. I did this because I was impressed by something that happened to us, to Nat and myself, when we gave the last acre of private land to Point Lobos. It had a considerably high value, you know, and it was very beautiful. We never got a letter from anybody! Some warden came through and wanted to talk about how they could fence it, or something. I thought there should have been more.

When I went on the commission some years afterwards, I really remembered that, because I thought it was a very poor way to handle it. So, I went out of my way to express the appreciation of the state when lands were given. And especially for all the redwood groves that were contributed through Save-The-Redwoods League. I wrote to all those people. I have friendships--I get Christmas cards from them still, ten years later--that grew out of those years of correspondence.

Riess: How often did the commission meet?

Owings: Once a month. Except during the bond issue things and so on, we had to meet much more often. There was one month, August I think, when we didn't meet.

Riess: Why is it that Mott says that he always talked to a committee of the commission, or through the channel of the chairman of the commission, rather than to individual commissioners?[1]

Owings: I can see that would be his policy, but I must say it wasn't always true, because I didn't respect it.

Riess: About his commissioners he says that "Zellerbach, a businessman, stood out as forthright and direct, and so did Owings. Both strong personalities."

Owings: Isn't that funny! Zellerbach and I were always on opposite sides of issues.

Riess: Maybe it was helpful to have that opposition articulated.

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[1]William Penn Mott in Services for Californians: Executive Department Issues in the Reagan Administration 1967-1974, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1986.

Owings: Although one can't really see oneself, and certainly I can't, I think I had an even temperament. Even when Zellerbach so irritated me, I might glare at him, but I never would say anything that would be offensive to him.

Tradeoffs and Losses

Riess: What other issues did you take a stand on as a commissioner?

Owings: On the Humble Oil refinery, a refinery on Monterey Bay at a time when they weren't even trying to smother the smoke or do anything about that kind of thing. It could have ruined the whole area. I wrote out resolutions and stuff. Harold voted for it. When it was written up in the paper it said, "Mr. Zellerbach even has a house in Carmel and he voted for it."

When I say we won that one, we got the commission to agree against it, but there was a lot of work done also by the citizens around Monterey Bay and by the paper.

But we failed to get all the land that Doris Duke was going to buy for us, up above the Pfeiffer Beach State Park and above the Post property, all that area where Ventana now is. She wrote a letter to the governor asking if she could give this to the state. It was brought before the commission. I heard about it just a little before, and so of course I rushed in to cheer.

Zellerbach said, "No, there's something wrong with this. I smell a rat." I always remember him saying that. "A rat." I don't know what the rat was he smelled, but the result was he said, "We can't vote on this now. We're not ready to vote on this now." Even though the staff had gone up and gotten maps and so on and shown how it would enrich the whole park and so on. Anyway, he put it off until the next meeting.

By the next meeting the young man who had talked Doris Duke into making this offer was killed in an accident. He was driving Doris Duke home and they stopped at a gate to her place. He got out to open the gates and she moved over to drive the car through and her foot jerked and hit the accelerator and killed him, knocked him down and killed him. So that was the end of that. I wrote to her trying to see if she wouldn't do it in his memory, but I didn't get an answer.

Riess: If you hadn't been there it sounds like these men would be willing to make deals and match votes and just put their time in, that there was not a lot of commitment.

Owings: I have to be careful what I say about that. Many of them learned as time went by.

Political Muscle, and Being a Woman on the Commission

Riess: When you resigned as a parks commissioner, one of the letters of tribute you received referred to your "political muscle."

Owings: Humorously enough, I didn't think I had political muscle in the slightest. I never considered myself related to the political scene, but I seem to have become so. It kind of snuck up on me. I became a Democrat. I was brought up in a very strong Republican family, but certain things changed me along the way, the environment in particular, and so I changed.

I remember standing in Governor Pat Brown's office, and he wasn't necessarily environmentally-minded, but by the time we were through with him we felt he was thoroughly environmentally-minded! We had him down here at the house, and Nat and I worked on him on different subjects, especially to do with the redwoods and the freeway passing through the redwoods. I stood in the middle of the floor and I said to him, "I thought I'd tell you, I'm changing from a Republican to a Democrat, and I wanted you to know it." And he said, "I'm very glad to hear it." And I never varied from that, although I would vote for a good Republican on some issues, because after all we have some good Republicans too. Later I thought up the idea of doing a "Conservationists for Brown" mailing when he ran against Reagan.

Riess: I love the photographs of the commissioners getting on and off helicopters, with you on the tarmac, or in the mud, wearing wonderful spectator pumps.

Owings: [laughing] I always wore those shoes. I wore them for years. I still have them.

Riess: Did you think consciously of your image as a woman and how to take advantage of it?

Owings: No, I didn't consciously, but I usually dressed carefully. If I was going to be on stage, as we were sometimes in big things, to say something or do something, I had some special orange dresses I wore. I mean, I did that kind of thing. That's the only kind of thing I did in any theatrical way.

Riess: Were you always "Mrs. Owings" to them, or was it "Margaret" on the commission?

Owings: It was mostly "Mrs.," occasionally "Margaret."

Riess: I noticed that in the early newspaper clippings about you, you were identified as "the wife of Nathaniel Owings."

Owings: Yes.

Riess: Did you object to that, or was that useful?

Owings: It didn't matter to me, one way or another. In the redwood issues, in those newspaper clippings, sometimes I'm "Mrs. Nathaniel Owings," and then it will say, "wife of the nationally known architect," and that didn't really bother me, even though we were talking about something completely different.

I never played the feminist role. I never entered into that because I was always too busy. Things like that didn't bother me. I'd give them a look and forget about it because I had too much to do. I never fought the battles of the feminists which a good many others did.

Riess: You replaced another woman on the commission when you came on. Was that a tradition?

Owings: No.

Riess: Was she a conservationist?

Owings: I really don't know.

Riess: Is it traditional that the outgoing commissioner recommends a replacement?

Owings: No, but when I resigned I recommended to Reagan that he appoint Ian McMillan, the condor man. (There's a nice article by him in Defenders of Wildlife this week.) We had worked together on fighting 1080 poison and on the mountain lion, because he was a rancher, and this is important in running cattle, living in lion country. I wanted people like that on the commission.

The Sierra Club and the Save-the-Redwoods League and the Trees

Riess: Were your ideas on conservation at that time influenced by David Brower and the Sierra Club?

Owings: Well, to some extent, but not a great deal. I mean, David Brower carried the flame. He had his problems, but there was something that burned high and strong, and that was good. It was something

to aim at, often. I was influenced by them, and then I had more and more friends from the Sierra Club. Nat and I took part in the Sierra Club meetings, giving speeches and so on.

Riess: His statements, or Sierra Club policy, did not help you in developing a philosophy of the wilderness for yourself?

Owings: Oh, I already felt very strongly about that. I felt so strongly about the need for wilderness that I didn't even have to think about it. [laughter]

Riess: People looking at the Save-the-Redwoods League might say that it was an elitist organization compared to the Sierra Club.

Owings: Often the Sierra Club came out against some of the things that Save-the-Redwoods League was moving towards, and vice-versa. During the national redwood park hearings there were really several sections of thought. We had the plans--there were really three parks that were proposed: some much larger than others, some which included the state parks we'd already acquired through Save-the-Redwoods League, like Prairie Creek. And then the third one, which was decided on, had some beautiful trees on it, but it also has some scrub land, cut-over land, that went with it as a sort of protective measure.

That became quite a big battle, the selection of that park. Ed Wayburn of the Sierra Club felt so strongly about it that unless it was the kind of park that he was in favor of, the linear boundaries of it, he didn't want any park at all. He got up and said that.

That, I thought, was an astonishing statement. Nat and I spoke at that same meeting. It was up in Arcata. Wayburn held very strongly to preservation, but I found that sometimes you have to compromise. I don't like compromise at all, but often you have to compromise or lose everything. And that's what he was talking about, really. He didn't want anything at all if he couldn't have what he wanted.

Granted, it is going exactly the way we knew it would go. Ninety percent of the old-growth redwoods, and the fine redwoods, are now either cut or to be cut. They are in the hands of lumbermen who will not sell them. Only ten percent are in park hands. I got that from John DeWitt. I called him yesterday, just to check.

Riess: Newton Drury believed one should never compromise, and he was from the Save-the-Redwoods League side.

Owings: Granted. But there are times when if you are about to lose all, you have to give up something to salvage the situation.

Reagan and the Redwoods

Riess: I think it was Norman [Ike] Livermore who suggested various land trades to solve the Redwood National Park problem.

Owings: You see, he's a redwood man, land owner. I've always liked Ike, and I like him now, very much. But he stood so strongly that he seemed to be blind to some things to do with the redwoods. He didn't seem to see that we were going to have these islands of tall trees left. And that's all that will be left very soon. They'll all be gone.

Riess: He proposed that the federal government could take over all the state parks in the redwoods, and California could take over various federal properties, like Camp Pendleton, and Devil's Postpile. And there would be freeway trades and such. Do you remember?

Owings: I remember this in the thinking and the discussions, but we didn't really enter into that. This was during Reagan's time, when Reagan wanted to sell a number of our parks. As soon as he came into office he wanted to sell them, which astonished us quite a bit.

Riess: Because they "weren't being used?" Was that the idea?

Owings: Yes, and we could get that money and put it in something else.

Well, it was just outrageous. It was an incredible blind spot on Reagan's part. When he was running against Brown for governor, I sent out a mailing showing that famous cartoon "When you've seen one redwood, you've seen them all." It was Reagan standing on a stump of a redwood tree with stumps all around it. (Though he denied saying it, the cartoon hurt him.) This may have made a difference between myself and Governor Reagan.

The Lumber Companies

Owings: During the Redwood National Park fight I had a friend, Rudolf Becking, who was a forest research consultant and very strong and analytical in a highly intelligent way. He knew more than almost any of the people talking. But he knew so much that people resented him. We corresponded a good deal, along with reading one another's papers and attending the same hearings. I wrote to him here: "I only wish that I could be of help to you, for I have never had the privilege of observing an issue so confused through

the democratic process that it can't 'get up and go' equal in scope to this one."

It was just a hangdog kind of thing about this final decision. Meantime, the lumbermen were cutting away at the very things that we had under consideration. The redwoods were the one thing that Ike Livermore and I fully disagreed about. There were a lot of other things we didn't disagree about.

I even got into correspondence with the presidents of the lumber companies. [laughs] No one else on the commission was doing this kind of thing, but I was. This was Mr. William Wolfe, senior vice-president of Arcata National Redwood Company. He had written a statement to the press, information about John DeWitt, head of Save-the-Redwoods League, that was very condemning, very bad. And so I wrote this:

> [reading] I appreciate your letter giving council members opportunity to respond to what you call "intemperate communications from John DeWitt." The statements which you have especially singled out to illustrate Mr. DeWitt's response to the series of events that have occurred have both my consent and endorsement. As the great trees disappear through clear cutting in the fragile areas adjacent to the Redwood National Park it is right and natural that those who have been working to guard those trees intensify their efforts, and possibly make "major departures from past practices."
>
> Reading Keith Lanning's letter to John DeWitt, I note with some humor an attempt to tar the League with "plays for the press" and "the standard ploys all too commonly used of late." Dare I call your attention to the trucks rumbling to the nation's capital carrying great redwood logs? A ploy indeed, but one that backfired.

Riess: How did it backfire?

Owings: Oh, it made people furious. It just made people mad as hell. Seeing these great trees going--it was like taking a king and taking his body across the land that people could love him. It made people furious.

Everything I did I learned an awful lot from. I learned about the human race so much more than I had ever dreamt I was going to. It's always greed for themselves.

The truckers--it was only a few miles further to go on the ridge road that they're now beginning to cut timber from! They are going to have it much wider than we thought, much wider than we had planned and had agreed upon. I heard this just the other day. They are taking down just enormous numbers of redwoods to do that. I thought when we won that, when we got the great groves on the flats, that we had really learned something. But it's been this long, so many years; that was the sixties, now it's the mid-eighties. It's taken a long time for anything to happen.

Riess: When you think that you've won something, unless you've spelled it out exactly, exactly how wide to the inch the road will be, and how--.

Owings: That was not one of the subjects brought up, oddly enough. It's a subject I'm very much aware of now, here in Big Sur. I think they informed us of the width of the road, but I myself was so relieved to get them out of the alluvial flats that I didn't think of that so much as a problem.

Riess: Every time you agree on something, you have to have lawyers and get it all spelled out. Is that what Dick Leonard did?[1]

Owings: Yes, and that's why he'd be much more exact in his oral history!

Riess: Did you use him on any park commission issue?

Owings: I don't think as a commission we used him. We did have a lawyer who was with us the whole time. But we saw Dick and Doris a great deal. They would come to our meetings and come to our hearings and voice things. I didn't think of it at the time as Dick in the role of a lawyer as much as I did as another Sierra Club conservation person to express his points of view.

After Jerry Brown came into power he was not interested in continuing the moneys for the highways. He vetoed a great many measures and so forth, much to our relief.

The Highway Commission in part--I think I'll say this out loud--some of the members of the staff were really like mafia people.

Riess: Concrete and cement! Like mafia people, or <u>were</u> mafia people?

Owings: Well, I have to say like, because I don't know that. But their personalities and the way they fought things!

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[1]Richard Manning Leonard, <u>Mountaineer, Lawyer, Environmentalist</u>, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1975.

There was a state senator who fought us so much, Randolph Collier, who was in the cement business for highways. That was where his money was, and he fought for the widening of every freeway. He was totally opposed to anything we did up in the redwoods. He wanted it the best and the widest and so forth. And he had a strong power up there with the senators. It was a strange connection. It's interesting within the senate, for example, to see some senators in control. [telephone rings] Excuse me.

VIII BIG SUR

[Interview 4: October 29, 1986]

Caltrans and Five Trees, 1986

Owings: [overheard telephone conversation] "I've been to meetings so often in the past--. I think there are a good many points that we can ask about and question the validity of, if we give a nudge ahead of time to a few people who might get up and speak well about it, or ask questions about it, or criticize it.

"Yes...yes. What do you think, let the people begin it, or yourself, for example?

"All right, well, before this meeting I'd like to talk with you again about that checklist. In the meantime, I'll put together a checklist myself, but I know you'll have some things to add to it.

"Karen is going to be able to come, and she will, I hope, emphasize the land use plan and what the intent of it was, even though at the time that this came up he couldn't remember anything about the scenic highways. The main thing he remembered was that they got through the legislature no billboards on scenic highways. But there were a few other things. He said he'd inquire for me, but I haven't heard from him. I'll have to call him again.

[pause] "Exactly. I'm going to work on that in the next few days. I'm sorry my husband is not alive, for many reasons other than this, but he would have pounced in on this one very strong. Because he really began the whole idea of the scenic highways.

"All right. I'll talk with you again. If you aren't at your office I might be able to reach you at home some time?

[telephone call ends]

Riess: Would you say for the record what it is that you are working on? [referring to call]

Owings: All right. I suppose in a manner I am particularly sensitive and quick to take action about the cutting of trees. After the redwood battles that I have been talking about. We have one now in our hands down here in Big Sur. It might seem to many like a very small issue, but it's a much larger issue than the five trees that we are dealing with.

Caltrans [California Department of Transportation] is being paid a million dollars to widen and resurface the road from Little Sur River to the end of the Big Sur Valley, which it really did not need. They've already done part of it, and they're working on it now. Eighty percent, $800,000 of their funds, come from the feds, and that pleases them a great deal, and $200,000 from the state. But with that 80 percent gift comes certain regulations that the feds want, the width of the road and so forth. This is not a freeway, this is a highway and it's 6.87 miles. That's as long as it is.

They have already compromised the amount coming along the Big Sur road, especially that cliff part of the road near Hurricane Point where you can't make a road any wider than it is unless you blast the whole mountain down. We'll all leap into battle before that happens. For a two-lane highway, they've already compromised it, they say, to 32 feet. They say they would have agreed to 28 feet where it comes through the redwoods and the small forests that are left in the Big Sur Park and the Big Sur valley.

There were a number of places that were canopied with redwoods and sycamores, and this is the last one left. And it is about time someone stopped them. They made such an operation on the crossing of the Juan Higuera Creek, with that broad bridge and the wide span. The number of trees they took down, including many large redwoods--it was all done before I really woke up to it. So I didn't enter into that fight.

Just as you enter the valley there is a very shadowed area that is about 22 feet, which means 11 feet for a lane, which is narrow. It <u>is</u> narrow, and we <u>know</u> it is narrow. But because it has curves and is shadowed, the two highway patrolmen who live down here and know the place by heart say that that is the place where people slow down when they come into that narrow area. They've had only two accidents there: one was a man who fell asleep at the wheel and hit a tree, and another one was some suicide thing. So they think the minute we start cutting trees away to make a straighter line, this is where it's going to increase the speeds.

Riess: And will they testify to that?

Owings: Well, they have spoken about it, and they've been told to shut up by the Department of Transportation. I'll see if they will speak again, but it's been very awkward.

People kept asking me, "Which trees are they?" So I made red signs saying, "Trees To Be Cut." I couldn't reach high enough, so I got one of the patrolmen, because I wanted to be sure that I was doing it to the right trees, and I said, "You know, it would be much more logical that you do it, except I know what would happen if someone came by just as you were nailing up 'Trees To Be Cut,' this flamboyant red sign. You'd probably lose your job forever." He laughed and hurried away, so I did it in solitude.

As soon as Caltrans came, of course, they took the signs down. The patrolman had said to me, "Don't do it today, anyway, because they'll have it off in an hour, any Caltrans man who comes." He said, "Wait until Saturday, because they don't work on Saturday and they won't do a thing on Saturday or Sunday," So I got there Saturday morning and did it, and they were up for two days.

Riess: Do you have the community behind you?

Owings: Yes, and I've made quite a bit of noise about it. We've had a number of meetings, and we've gotten our assemblyman, Sam Farr, and Eric Seastrand from San Luis Obispo, behind us. We have the board of supervisors behind us and we have, I gather, about 2,200 or 2,300 signatures on a petition that I'm going to present. We're having our first hearing about this, a town meeting kind of thing, next week.

Riess: But in the meantime it has become your issue? You said it is "Caltrans versus Owings?"

Owings: Yes. I thought I was just one of the people, and I thought after Sam Farr and Eric Seastrand joined in then I could agree to have myself as a petitioner. But now I've watched the correspondence and received copies, and it has changed to "Caltrans versus Owings," which isn't quite the way I had wanted it. To get into a thing like that I need my husband Nat to back me up.

In the beginning, when it got passed through the Coastal Commission, they told no one about it. The hearing came in some other city, some other place. We knew nothing about it. Only the Caltrans man came down to speak to the commission, and he said, "It's nothing, it's not a public controversy, no one's interested

in it, and it will do no environmental damage. It's a safety measure. We will save lives by having the road widened there." They just swallowed it hook, line, and sinker.

Although staff recommended against voting for it, the whole commission except one man voted for it. So it passed. We knew nothing about it, and so not one voice spoke against it. I myself knew nothing about it. I think some people might have known something about it, but many people who know things don't speak up.

Riess: If the staff disapproved of it completely, I don't understand why the commission would so cavalierly override that.

Owings: Well, of course, it's primarily Deukmejian's commission. But the one man who came down to see it voted against it.

First time I heard about it, I called the man in charge down in San Luis Obispo, and then wrote him a letter. I didn't get around to xeroxing my letter, otherwise I would have sent it all over. (I almost wrote to his secretary and said, "Would you mind xeroxing my letter and sending it back?" Because I don't feel that I can write it again.)

In my letter I referred to the battles that we'd had over the redwoods up in Humboldt near Prairie Creek that I worked on for two years. Because of those battles I had thought a great deal about it. I told this man this, and I just begged him not to take the last canopy we have. That's the last one. They've been able to remove every other canopy of trees. They cut them thinner and thinner and thinner, and then they're gone.

Riess: Who is "the man down there?"

Owings: He is head of Caltrans for this region. His name is Pollock. He wrote me a long, careful letter in return, and I appreciated his writing it, but he certainly was set on it. They had made their decision, and they've let the contract to the Madonna Construction Company.

The Words that Move People to Action

Riess: You were saying earlier something about the general greed of individuals, how they never can see beyond their immediate needs and noses. It seems to me that so many of the things that you've

written are designed to inspire people to have a broader and more generous view.

Owings: This is my way of doing things. I have a feeling that words and thoughts that are expressed, and carefully thought out, can do much more than many other things. I believe in speech. Having listened to Churchill during the war years, and realizing that the fate of England really rested with the words of that man for quite a period of time--really it literally became that, to an extraordinary degree.

I think that when I feel something strongly, that is the way to do it. I'm going to put together a little speech for this meeting that will be brief, but I'm going to really plot this out.

Riess: The Pete Seeger verse that you've used in a couple of your speeches, "God Bless the Grass," why are people hushed and moved by that? Do you think it's the word "God," or is it that tiny struggling grass?

Owings: It struggles through the ceiling of the asphalt.

It's interesting, when I gave the speech that had that in it at Yosemite to the landscape architects I felt the whole room--I felt what people on stage feel, actors and actresses feel when they've got the audience there with them, or they've moved the audience with a word or two that they've said. I'm not accustomed to it, but using that at that particular time, I felt I had the whole room with me.

It's a silly thing to say, perhaps, and I don't mean to be patting myself on the back. I just think it's a method. They talk critically today about rhetoric. They say, "Oh, it's only rhetoric." And a man who's on the other side of something, he says, "All that is rhetoric." Of course rhetoric can be absurd, it can be just a nuisance. But I think it's something.

Riess: Whether it moves people to do anything is the question. Maybe it soothes them that someone has put things so beautifully? It almost satisfies a need. They can continue to go on doing not a darn thing. Do you ever have that feeling? Sometimes when the very worst things in life are spelled out, you don't feel as bad as you did before, because you know that some intelligent person has applied himself to this question. You feel a little safer and better.

Owings: I think you have a point there. But I think these issues actually have a kind of spiritual quality to them, these environmental

issues. Of course, there are many other issues in the country that also have that. I think that you can reach out to people.

After that landscape architecture meeting--I received lots and lots of letters after it, which naturally first surprised and then pleased me. I thought I'd reached some people, that they'd bothered to find my address and write to me. When I talked to people after the whole thing had come to a close, I felt they remembered what I had said.

The Politics of Fighting a Freeway in Big Sur, 1963

Riess: You said you changed from Republican to Democrat. Nat was a Democrat?

Owings: I think when he married me he was more or less a Republican. But anything we became as a team we became very thoroughly as a team. And then having that association with Adlai Stevenson, whom we both loved so much, was just one more connection there that strengthened our feelings.

Riess: Did Fred Farr influence you very much? He was a Democrat, wasn't he?

Owings: Yes, and he was the one whom I asked to introduce the removal of the mountain lion bounty bill in 1963. I remember exactly the moment I asked him, too.

Riess: The mountain lion issue preceded the Big Sur highway issue?

Owings: Yes. Of course, we'd been ruminating a long time about the road here. This is when Fred Farr first came into our lives completely. The state senate and assembly had passed this bill about the freeway system in California. That was when they were eager to build freeways. We sent a letter to Fred Farr about it, because he was one of those that maybe had voted for it.

The freeway coming down the Big Sur coast meant they were going to fill the canyons and blast the mountains and absolutely ruin the land. As it is, it's very badly scarred, like a scar right across a beautiful face, really, the road is. But what it would have been would have been impossible.

They started to work on a canyon down here near the Hudson house--I'll have to look up the name of it--they were going to fill it. It had an old bridge on it, Dolan Bridge, and Nat went

down and loved the old bridge and so he got engineers from S.O.M. [Skidmore, Owings, Merrill] to come down and study it and climb under it and see how long it would last and how safe it was and so on. Then Nat went up to Governor Brown and gave a report on this, because it showed how they were actually just going to make a mess out of things. It was just incredible what they were doing to do. And he got it stopped. That had to go through the Highway Commission.

Anyway, we sent an open letter to Fred Farr, and it was on the editorial page, boxed. Nat and I had just been along the Amalfi Drive, where I'd been several times before, and we talked about the charm of everything, and the way they kept the road very narrow and had stone walls and so on. And we said that what this road was going to do, instead, was to make faster traffic possible, and simply for trucking and everything else to go through fast was not the reason to have it.

That was our first step, and then we began to think, "If we're going to keep this road narrow, we're going to have to keep the people out of it. We cannot have it as it was." There was no zoning about any building down here, none whatsoever. You could build six feet from your neighbor and dig out any road you wanted. That's when we started.

The Original Propertyholders

Riess: When you moved down here, what was the road like?

Owings: It was quite poor. There were no lines, nothing in the middle, and in the fog I'd get out with a flashlight often and walk ahead of the car. There was very little traffic. [Highway 1 was extended through Big Sur in 1938.]

I told you about when I first came down here in 1934 with Malcolm Millard, whose father had the cabin up at Lafler Canyon. When I went back to Chicago, when I was living in Deerfield, I began to write a novel about a road, about this road, and about the Borondas who lived on the property above us and to the south. He was very handsome, Spanish, totally Spanish-looking, a big man with a mustache that curled up. He had a white horse and he wore a marvelous big hat.

He married a woman who was getting her Ph.D. at the University of California, and had a nervous breakdown. She came down to Big Sur and she met him and they married. It was the most

extraordinary marriage, of course, of all times, because he was a man without education at all. In the end, interestingly enough, she became the fiercer of the two to guard the land, and always would shoot at people if she saw them coming across the property.

Riess: Did you finish the novel?

Owings: No, I didn't. But I loved it so here that when I was away from it I liked to be writing about it. It had a good potential. I had the Boronda family focused against this terrible intrusion.

You see, the property down here, the reason it is as relatively scarcely populated as it is is because these were such large land grants that were given to these first pioneer people by the Spanish.

Riess: Molera was one?

Owings: Yes, and Captain Cooper was in the Molera family, and the school is named from that connection there.

Riess: But they had been broken up?

Owings: Yes, and after they established the Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park, the Pfeiffer family, of which we have one member left, Mrs. [Hans] Ewoldsen, they gave a good deal, and of course what was bought was nothing in the line of high finance in the way it would be today.

Esther Ewoldsen and her husband Hans lived in that little house on the Molera property that you see as you look down that has the eucalyptus trees in a cluster around it. [laughing] Now I'm also fighting about that, because the parks said they were going to get rid of all exotic trees in the park system. They were going to cut down every eucalyptus tree there. I said, "Talk about historic things. They go with the house, 'The House in the Eucalyptus Trees.'"

Riess: On the issue of the proposed freeway, this was once again something you read about first in the newspaper?

Owings: I don't remember our first knowledge of it.

We always had Nick Roosevelt. The three of us were the three that worked together on this. Of course, many people also joined later, and we had meetings here at the house, and we had about twenty or thirty people here. Nat was pounding away at the roads and then pounding away at the master plan. And it became a pivot of our lives, other than Nat's work and his business. This was in the early 1960s.

Riess: Did locals like Henry Miller attend meetings on the highway issue here at your house?

Owings: Henry didn't take much of a role in any of the issues. But [William E.] Will Colby was active in it. Will lived in Coastlands. He was a pillar of strength.

Then we had committees. We began to organize. David Tollerton, who was a sculptor--I don't know whether you are familiar with him. The Tollerton family are characterful people, with a wonderful mother whom we used to know up at Echo Lake when we were children.

Nat Owings, Nick Roosevelt, and the Challenge

Riess: Was the highway group an outgrowth of the Point Lobos League?

Owings: No, it was separate. And it wasn't really terribly well organized; it was run by Nat and Nick, and I was way down as third party. But I was always with them and backing them. When we'd go over to the hearings in Salinas--we had incredible hearings and many of them--Nick would sit on one side of Nat, and I would sit on the other, because Nat, when he'd hear someone say something perfectly awful up there in front of the podium, he would start to rise to his feet, and Nick and I would hold him down. [laughing]

Riess: Monterey was your county seat, wasn't it?

Owings: No, Salinas, and the board of supervisors met in the courthouse in Salinas.

Riess: It would strike me that going to Salinas was going into a psychically different atmosphere than going to Monterey.

Owings: Totally.

Riess: Of those supervisors, how many <u>really</u> represented your area?

Owings: Oh, for a while we had quite an alien group. Tom Hudson was the supervisor for our area. When we finally got through we had to compromise, so that when we left the hall at the final end when the vote was taken we felt downcast, but then we realized afterwards that we had accomplished a great deal.

The thing that we had to compromise on was actually a conflict of interest on the part of Tom Hudson who was the head of the board of supervisors, who said he would vote it down if we did not leave the Hill Ranch out of our master plan, because he was the lawyer for the Hill Ranch. And that was the one that we had these battles about. So we had to give in to that, otherwise we'd have lost everything. And it hurt us a great deal.

Riess: This got to be a state issue, didn't it?

Owings: Yes, making this into California's first scenic road, and that, I would say, was Nat's doing. Nat was it, although they had a committee built around that. I'm trying to lean on the character of that first scenic road in defying what Caltrans wants to do with it now with the widening. I feel they should treat it very much differently than other highways or, naturally, freeways.

Riess: In Nat's book there are some passages about reading Proust and doing stitchery that imply a more leisurely time than what you describe.

Owings: That was the hour after dinner kind of thing.

Riess: You had to save an hour for yourselves?

Owings: We lived with it, I lived with it, terrifically. Nat lived with it a great deal too, except that he had so many other things to do with architecture and his firm that were also crowding in on him. But this was his delight.

Nat liked nothing better than a challenge. Really, he liked nothing better than when he ran into opinions opposite from his own. He had an enormous leadership quality that you rarely see in people, but he also had a temper, so that sometimes the things that he led--Bill Fassett would say, "I just go around behind Nat, no matter what he does, and follow whatever he says. And if Nat says this, I go that way too. If Nat says that, I go that way." There were many people who did that.

Nat could hurt the cause. When he was offended by something that was being said or done he'd really lash out, and that was difficult. But he was a cohesive power.

Nat always did everything intuitively, he didn't ever plan anything, and so we never knew when we began our meetings what he was going to say. But he often had people in the palm of his hand, because he always began--he was a great jokester and laughed a lot--telling some little incident that had just occurred that was on himself, and then everyone would begin to laugh and smile

and they'd get less tense. And after he got them all lessened down in their tenseness, then he'd begin on the issues where he was going to force different things upon them. Such as the zoning.

Riess: Did he bring the supervisors around with those charming ways?

Owings: Oh yes. It was because of Nat and Nick Roosevelt, the two of them.

Nick was very exacting in what he did. Nick would never get up and do the things that Nat did. But Nick would have been like me, he would have written everything down and prepared it very carefully. Nick was always writing for the newspaper, writing for the Examiner, writing for the New York Times. As he said to us, "You know, I'm an old newspaper man myself." He knew many columnists and editors and therefore placed articles. It became a nationally known effort we were making down here.

Riess: Did that gain you additional support?

Owings: It helped us. It made some of the people mad. Of course, you can always make some people mad. They said, "Well, you're just bringing more people to Big Sur, because you're talking about it so much." Which of course was a fact, but it was also not a fact. We were trying to direct the thinking and the planning of it.

> [reading] ...we were disappointed in the final reduction of acreage density controls. But we'd reached high and held firm as long as possible, and the final compromise was well worth the long battle...

Nick Roosevelt--Nat used to love to talk about this, and I remember the day so clearly, over in Salinas--he gave a full half-hour speech, and he rehearsed it twice here in our house. We called his speech, "The Nature of the Opposition." He charged that the opposition was led by a group of absentee landlords, with no interest in the area but as a place to complete their real estate operations free from restrictions. He described one woman as "self-righteously wrapping herself in the Constitution."

One woman got up--she wanted this development near Garrapata, and she was not on our side. She began her statement with this passage from The Prophet: "Would that I could gather our houses into my hand and like the sower scatter them in forest and meadow. Would the valleys were your streets, and the green paths your alleys, that you might seek one another through the vineyards and come with the fragrance of the earth in your garments."

[laughing] She was one with a lawyer. We had a number of lawyers against us, I mean people who had hired lawyers.

Let me read you one other little part. One year after the plan had been made public, the battle reached its peak. I dug into a pile of news clippings to give you a flavor. One reads: "Big crowd hears stormy debate on plans for the coast." (By this time, two real estate developers had presented two separate plans of their own, each favoring the density suitable for their type of development.)

The clipping goes on to say, "Three plans for scenic development of Highway 1 were argued during the standing-room-only hearings. Four hours and fourteen speakers later, weary commissioners decided to continue the already once-continued hearings, although some among the 125 persons present desiring to speak had not yet been heard."

Personal Attacks

Owings: Oh, it was just terrific! I took it sort of hard. I was terribly tense about it and worried about it. And they couldn't understand why we wanted to work on this. They thought we were doing it for money. They couldn't imagine anyone doing anything--. We must have some plan, but they couldn't figure out what the plan was. We were "buying up Big Sur property under other people's names," and things like that. We'd read this in the paper. We heard it on the radio one time.

And these things upset me. I wanted to speak up about them. I went to Allen Griffin, the editor of the Monterey Herald, who was with us. He was a great help for us. I wanted to speak about a number of these invented lies. And he--what was the statement he made?--he said something to calm me down. He said I should ignore it, "Don't make something of it or you just blow it up more." So I was held down several times in the courthouse when people would begin to speak about me and how I wanted to save the sea lions just for myself.

[Owings tells about the sign reading "1000 Sea Lions" with an arrow pointing down, on the iron railing beyond her house, where people would get out to look at sea lions.] There were accidents, death after death after death. We were always the people who saw them, and it was not a joke. We didn't have the services we have now, and it had to be our local people with big ropes who'd go

down and risk their own lives to rescue the sightseers, and they'd use helicopters and so on.

Anyway, I went over there and sprayed that sign all white. One of the Grimeses got up and said, "I saw Mrs. Owings spraying out the sign telling people where they could watch the sea lions. She wants everything just for herself!" I rose from my seat in the audience furious, just furious, to say, "Do you know how many people have died because of that sign just in this past year?"

Riess: Was it fury, or were you on the verge of tears?

Owings: I never cried in those meetings, although I cried at home in bed at night after it was all over.

But Nat was like a tempest when he lashed out. He made a statement for the press--the press loved him because he made such amusing statements--just as he was leaving, when it looked as if we were completely defeated. He said, "Like Foch at the Marne, we're defeated but the situation is excellent." Now he was strong and ready to go and we were further along than we had been. Everything was positive. He always came out with an optimistic interpretation of the horrors we had gone through

We had some very good reporters, very good in presenting our side fairly. Also presenting the other side, but not with quite the enthusiasm they presented our side.

Riess: The times you would meet here to plan?

Owings: We were here or in the Grange Hall. When we met here it was usually to present plans. Nat had a map of the whole coast and the divisions of the property, and where there were houses, and the parts that we called the "viewshed"--we had some new terminology we invented at the time--the part that should be kept from building.

And, of course, people had a real point on one thing. They said, "Look, the Owings come down here, they build right on the ocean side in this viewshed, and then they turn around and attack everyone else for doing the same thing." [laughs] They had a point, and I knew they had a point, and Nat knew they had a point. But we'd have to laugh about it. When we did it, though, we had no conception we were going to begin to look at the land the way we grew to look at it within a few years.

Pico Blanco

Owings: Something that has been going on in the last couple of days [October 29, 1986 date of interview] is the Pico Blanco controversy. That is going to the Supreme Court in Washington. It's not an issue of whether Pico Blanco will or will not be mined. It's an issue about whether the state has the right, through the Coastal Commission, to stop a thing such as the mining of a coastal mountain.[1]

The part that's being mined is National Forest lands. But the limestone has to be brought over private property down to the road or down to the Little Sur River mouth, that lovely beach. They talk about digging out and bringing barges in there. It would just wreck Big Sur, because it's one of the lovely, lovely spots in Big Sur, as you know. You come down that road and see the Big Sur lighthouse up there and the lovely inlet of water and silhouettes of things that are so marvelous.

Well, we fought it for a long time. The last time that Nat had a chance to fight it, he stood up in a board of supervisors meeting. He said several things, but then he raised up his arms and said, "Thou shalt not mine Pico Blanco!" Like that, and he went and sat down. Everyone was so startled. But it made an impression. It's the one thing people have always remembered was said at that particular meeting. I have a long paper I gave at the meeting, and no one remembers a word about that. [laughter]

Riess: Why does it keep coming up over again?

Owings: There was a play between the local judges. Some stopped it, and then others would go to the court of appeals, and then it would continue as an unsettled controversy--to get it to the Supreme Court. Of course, they may even turn down the right to decide on a thing of this sort. If they decided that the mining company had the right to mine without the okay of the Coastal Commission and our other land use plans, it would be a negative thing, but we'd keep on fighting. But if they said they didn't have the right, it would also be something where we would keep on fighting. So that we don't necessarily win from this, but we might be able to win a point from it.

The other day, the man at the Los Angeles Times thought it would be a good idea to get an article in the Washington Post. Because this is coming before the Supreme Court judges, he dreamed

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[1]March 24, 1987, there was a 5-4 decision for the state.

up a spectacular article that they might read beforehand so that it would have already come to their attention. In a thing of this sort, they don't go around talking about the aesthetics of the thing, it's just whether you have the right or not. So this reporter came around here and was talking with different people, and then he was going to talk to the owner [Bruce Wolpert and his son, Steven].

There was a time when we first came down here to live--not Nat and I but Malcolm and I--when we came down to look at Pico Blanco. We understood that there was talk of mining, and we could not believe they'd be mining it. But we could buy it then, all of us people could buy it, for $7,000. The peak of it, for only $7,000! But that was when we were buying San Jose Creek Beach and raising money. It was very hard to raise money, and $7,000 seemed like a lot of money to us. We sort of thought, "Oh dear, should we do anything or not?" And I'd just been working so hard on getting the money for the beaches that I just did not see how we could turn and start to get money for Pico Blanco all of a sudden. We let it go.

It was a mistake, of course, because now they've mined the back part. It's not only the mining of it which is a devastating act against nature, but it's also that they are likely to round around to the front part before long and start to ruin it. They talk about mining the whole thing down to the bottom and then having a lake down there.

Riess: Is it something for the Nature Conservancy to get involved in?

Owings: They don't want to sell it, you see, no one wants to sell it. It is supposed to have an especially fine quality of limestone, although in the State of California there are three other places where there is fine limestone. One of them is down in San Bernardino County, which isn't a scenery kind of thing; it isn't a key part of the coastline such as Pico Blanco is here, with the silhouette of the whole range.

Pico Blanco is the one place, if you recall, as you're driving south it's the first time you come to a place where you look in through the mountains to the depth behind, out of which Pico Blanco raises its peak. "The steep sea-wave of marble," Jeffers calls it. It is also terribly important as a watershed to the streams and springs and aquifers that come through. And think of all the natural growth along there with lots of redwoods they would have to cut!

As it is, when they first put the road in they did it without any permit at all, and so we held them up on that for a while.

They cut lots of redwoods. They cut a road for trucking, dumping all the earth down so that it clogged the stream. The stream is one of the steelhead streams. Earth falling into that, rocks falling into it and clogging it.

But people don't do anything about a thing! They say, "Isn't it bad," and click their tongues, and then they do nothing. Of course, that's the wonderful thing about the Sierra Club: if they do pick a thing up, they pick it up and they really run with it.

Riess: Who first picked this up?

Owings: I think the local Sierra Club, and later the Coastal Conservancy tried to buy a piece of the land to cut off the taking down of the lime to the highway. And the Save-the-Redwoods League offered a substantial amount for the purchase of this land. If they didn't take it out on barges and ruin that whole beautiful beach, they would take it out on trucks. They say every twelve minutes one of the big double trucks would be going up. This is California's first scenic road. Can you conceive of what that would do? Can you conceive of it?

Riess: I can't imagine how it got this far. Are the Wolperts local people?

Owings: Yes, Wolpert seems to win people over. Of course, many people don't feel won over in any way, just as Nat and I didn't. But he does seem to win people over. He says he'll just cut out the back and the silhouette of it will still be there. Then he drops it aside when you talk about how he's going to get the limestone out. It's a visual tragedy. He thinks he can get a billion tons of limestone out of it.

One time, Jim Hill, owner of the huge Hill Ranch which adjoins Pico Blanco, said, "I don't see what the big deal is, taking 700 feet off the top of the mountain!" Nat replied, "Young man, I'll tell you! It would be like a man of distinction and integrity with his head cut off."

Five Trees, Continued

Owings: This morning [October 29, 1986], when I answered the phone about seven-thirty, I heard a woman's voice. She was laughing so hard that I could hardly tell who it was. It turned out to be my friend Jean Kellogg. She's an artist and lecturer, and a very sensitive person. Her husband's name was Dickey. He is no longer

alive. She rarely laughs. And suddenly here she was laughing and laughing.

She was laughing because of this article that came out in the Herald this morning: "Case Over Five Big Sur Trees Draws Six Lawyers to Court." She thought that was just a riot. Six lawyers for five trees! It is true that we have gradually gathered these people, environmentally-minded lawyers, to speak up for these things.

We had the hearing in front of the judge yesterday afternoon. It was hard to get people there because it was the middle of the afternoon and the working men didn't want to go up to Monterey in the middle of the day, they couldn't get away. So I think we had only about twenty or twenty-five people there. But all these lawyers were there, including the Caltrans man, who was an excellent lawyer, the most professional of all of us, knew how to handle things very well at the meeting.

The point to make with them was that it was a public controversy. When you [Riess] came last time I was going to ask you to sign the petition, but I forgot. We got over 3,500 signatures. Although it wasn't much, it was a token. And then Caltrans ordered a meeting at the Grange Hall, which was good and open of them, and advertised it in the papers--in contrast to no advertisement, just whispering about going before the Coastal Commission. So that's what happened.

At that point I fell down over my little dog Muffet and was in the hospital and couldn't go to the meeting, after calling the whole thing together. Someone made a tape of the meeting. It pleased me that all these citizens had written penny-postcards--or fourteen-cent postcards or whatever they are--almost everyone I knew, and a long list of other people. And then we had a telephone tree to call people to come to this meeting, which was in the middle of the afternoon. Caltrans set the time, and of course it is very difficult for the public if they work at all.

However, they really came in and attacked, including a lot of people who worked on the road themselves with Caltrans. That delighted me. I lay in bed and listened to the tapes the other night, and I felt good. I felt good. Just as I felt good about the meeting yesterday. I felt we have come a long way. We haven't got it yet, but we have come a long way.

Riess: Did the two highway patrolmen you talked about last time testify that it would be less safe?

Owings: Yes, that it would be less safe with the road widened.

In the beginning Caltrans made rather broad statements, such as "seventeen accidents have occurred between a 1.3 mile stretch." As I said, our patrolmen who'd been living down here all that time knew the accidents. They knew that they weren't tree accidents, although one man had fallen asleep at the wheel and ran into the tree. Caltrans picked that up and said if the trees hadn't been there he wouldn't have bumped into the tree, even though it was off the road! At any rate, it was a misleading statement they made, and they were very quiet about that before the judge yesterday. I was interested to hear that.

Riess: You think you are going to stop them?

Owings: There's a chance. It's going to come up again in a few months.

Riess: In your hand there, are those notes for a speech you gave?

Owings: They are notes if I had to speak at that hearing yesterday. They didn't call on any of the petitioners or the audience, so I didn't. I came home. But I felt good.

It sounds as if it wasn't a total victory, but I felt good. Because I knew we'd come a hell of a long way from the time that they were going around with their scythes cutting the bushes around these trees. On Thursday they were going to cut the trees. Now they are going to do an EIS [environmental impact study] and they're going to return it to the Coastal Commission. And we'll really work on the Coastal Commission, even though they have a tendency not to be sympathetic to our point of view, since the best environmentally-minded men are being taken off the board and new ones are coming on.

Riess: Is Caltrans a little bit like the Army Corps of Engineers, in that they have a great will to destroy and straighten out?

Owings: They have some of that in them but they have come a long way in awareness and sensitivity toward the environment.

Up in the redwoods, Caltrans--or the California Transportation Department, which it was called then--they had, to begin with, really no environmentally-sensitive people who could make reports and analyze the damage that would be done to the environment. But now they have departmental people on the environment. So I felt better about that, even though their reasoning wasn't particularly wise.

We're talking about only five trees in contrast to the hundreds of trees we were talking about in the past. I felt that

if they get by with this particular thing they'll just go on any time they want to, whether it's trees, or whether it's blasting half a hill down, they'll do it. They told the Coastal Commission that the public is not interested, and I wanted to show them that, damn it, the public is interested. So we did it.

Riess: What agency currently decides what happens along Highway 1?

Owings: We've had to uncover this with these five trees by bringing up all these points and finding that there isn't a scenic road or highway committee, there's no active committee anymore. The main thing we were trying to finish off were the signboards. That was during that dreadful time of roadside signs, especially in beautiful places. Helen Reynolds was the one who worked on that for the California Roadside Council.

Riess: Since the designation as a scenic highway there hasn't been a group to monitor development or activity?

Owings: Yes, and this is what is going to grow out of these five trees. [laughs] I laugh as I say it, because it sounds so incredible. And after all the years of working to save just thousands of trees, to now focus on five trees!

Riess: Out of this whole controversy will come another watchdog group?

Owings: We're going to try to pass a bill that will provide funds so Caltrans will not feel so fretful about the lawsuits and insurance and all that business, though God knows a tree could be a hundred feet from the road and the car could dash off and hit it, and they had a case like that and lost, Caltrans lost.

Masterplanning Highway 1, 1960

Riess: Did the Sierra Club get involved in the scenic highway, Highway 1 issue?

Owings: To a degree. I think that's the way I'd say it. I wouldn't say they didn't get involved. But really, they didn't take an active part in that. They had other issues they were working on at the time. But bit by bit they came down and began to help on things, including trying to get our master plan through. But they said we must make the whole thing into a park. Well, that is easier said than done. So they got rather angry with us.

The point is that the only way that Nat got the people behind him at all on the master plan was--. It had been suggested that they make this into a national parkway, taking out all the houses bit by bit, and that would be that. It would be, of course, a road that would have all kinds of polite manners and surfaces and everything to make it very much used by the public. So Nat said, "I'll tell you what I'm going to do. Let's show them that we can do it ourselves." That's what the whole thing started out of. So they dropped the issue of the national parkway. They have reopened it since, and we also had the Wilson bill recently."[1]

Riess: In David Brower's introduction to the Not Man Apart book he says: "The Jeffers country is fully qualified to be a national seashore, but it never will be, not in the usual sense." That was in 1965. I wondered whether that was said out of some great disappointment.

Owings: It's funny, I often don't pick up that book for long periods of time, but I picked it up the other day and I happened to read that line, and was surprised by it. We always have hope, you know, those of us who believe in the place, a lot. Even if we're only halfway saving it now, we hope to do more and accomplish more later. So that I'm surprised that Brower said that.

We were so happy not to have that highway put in here. It was going to be a four-lane highway, if you can conceive of it. We have enough fires and slides and everything going on right now.

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[1]San Francisco Chronicle, June 29, 1986, Harold Gilliam writes: "Senator Pete Wilson has introduced a bill for a Big Sur National Forest Scenic Area. It would be administered by the Forest Service and include lands now belonging to the Forest Service, the state, the Coast Guard and private landholders who would be willing to sell. Existing grazing would continue, but there would be no logging, no mining, and no offshore drilling.

"Most of the funds to carry out the bill would be raised privately, with a small amount of federal seed money. [Leon] Panetta, not entirely happy with Wilson's approach, is working with Big Sur residents and environmentalists to develop a consensus.

"The initial reaction of many Big Sur residents to the Wilson bill has been negative. They say the coast will be sufficiently protected by the Big Sur Local Coastal Plan approved by the Monterey County Board of Supervisors and the Coastal Commission.

"Their fear of federalization is understandable."

To Margaret Truman — what a delightful home and
a superb view! My warmest thanks — Lady Bird Johnson
for sharing it with us. September 1966

Riess: You're not saying, though, that there was an opposing point of view on the part of the Sierra Club? They just went elsewhere and let it be the Owings Plan?

Owings: Well, they entered in more with the Owings Plan when we first got it made into a scenic highway in 1966 and had Lady Bird Johnson here for the dedication [see following page]. We had Sierra Club people here too. But they didn't take as active a part. I think maybe that would be the way to phrase it.

NRDC [National Resources Defense Council] takes a very active part in things. They have been just bricks about things. Just bricks. This particular woman, Anne Nordhoff, has been just swell. She comes and testifies at all our hearings. She comes down also and testifies at our sea otter hearings when they are of any consequence. She does everything, rushes right out. She's a young woman with a baby now, and seems to be able to leave her baby long enough to rush out and do these things, and to do them with great strength.

Riess: How about the Nature Conservancy. They are involved at Big Creek?

Owings: They helped to raise funds and put up money for it. And Save-the-Redwoods League, of course, did a large scoop of that too. And some special donors, who came here for the dedication.

Ansel spoke then, and I spoke, and a number of people spoke, and then some came here afterwards. These were people of means who were, of course, terribly disappointed when the fire came in 1985. They keep looking at it hopefully, optimistically, that things will return, but a great deal was lost.

To me, a landscape is not just a bare landscape with trees and single rocks standing; it is the life. A lot of life.

159a

Sept. 22, 1966
DEDICATION AT BIXBY -
" CALif FIRST SCENIC HIGHWAY "
MRS. JOHNSON READ THIS -
MARGARET OWINGS WROTE IT.

Words of Dedication - for Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson

I dedicate California's first Scenic Highway today - as the maintenance of a Trust - a Trust for ourselves - and a Trust for the generations to follow.

It is a partnership of open-space and man's use - a heritage of landscape to be shared by all.

Here - on the Monterey coast - this 72 miles of fine shining thread - is a road - linking - bridging and weaving the mountain range and the Pacific.

Here - along this road - a value is placed on preserving and strengthening a sense of awe - of wonder.

Here - ~~man~~ men may seek ~~his~~ their release in motion - driving like a flight of birds traveling north and south.

How appropriate that this route has been named "The Cabrillo Highway" - after Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo - who sailed past this headland in 1542 - with a sense of exploring the unknown - a sense of adventure.

For, here - this curve of the road holds a sense of adventure - the adventure of the high view, its majesty - and its changing moods.

The people of the nation are indebted to those of you in high office of the State of California and the County of Monterey - indebted to the residents of the coast - who took action to safeguard the land along which this scenic road now travels. For, this coastline lies here in the afternoon

sun - the western boundary of our continent.

Inscribed on this plaque - we can read the words of Robinson Jeffers - from his poem entitled "Continent's End". quote: "I gazing at the boundaries of granite and spray
the established sea-marks, felt behind me
Mountain and plain, the immense breadth of the continent,
before me - the mass and doubled stretch of water."

And, at this "continent's end" I stand today - and take pride in dedicating this scenic highway for the joy of all who come to share it.

IX OTHER PRESERVATIONISTS

Defenders of Wildlife, 1969-1974

Riess: We have been going through the causes you championed, the beach in 1952, the sea lions in 1959, the freeway threat in 1963. Could you have settled back then?

Owings: Oh no, there was no end! I was just teeming with things I wanted to do.

I got on the park commission in 1963 and got involved with the redwoods, and after that was the sea otter. [Friends of the Sea Otter was started in 1968.] But in the meantime, because I wrote articles about things, I became recognized as someone who was interested in wildlife, and so I was asked to go onto the Defenders of Wildlife board, which I did in 1969. I had gone on the African Wildlife Leadership Foundation board in 1968 [until 1980] after our Africa trip. That was started by Russell Train.

Riess: Do you call yourself an environmentalist, or conservationist, or what?

Owings: I kind of call myself sometimes one or the other, depending on who I'm talking to and about what. I call myself sometimes an environmentalist and sometimes a conservationist, and I'm especially interested in wildlife, so I nearly always add that, because that has taken up so much of my time. And thought. And work.

Riess: And did your own coloration change in these groups, do you think?

Owings: Well, whether my role was leadership or actions on a board, I suppose I used different energies.

The most remarkable thing about it is that I knew nothing. When I started, I knew nothing. Because I had museum work at Radcliffe, and when I was at Mills I wasn't involved with

environmental things. They weren't much in the news or in conversation at that time, and I didn't think a great deal about them. I was always alarmed at the felling of any tree, but that was just my own special thing. I really suffered as a tree fell, I really felt a life had been taken, I felt that within myself.

Riess: Tell me about the Defenders of Wildlife. Who were they?

Owings: Well, there was a little woman named Mary Hazel Harris who was the secretary in an office, I think it was a one-room office, and it was called Defenders of Wildlife. I think of it almost as if the printing was done by a mimeograph machine. Anyway, she was in charge, and she collected things and sent them out. They had some little board. I don't remember who the first people were. It was very insignificant.

And that little woman, that little woman, she got a strong feeling about the coyotes. And, by golly, we were going to save the coyotes. She started concentrating on the coyotes and bringing people in who could write about them, the negatives and the positives, the facts of what was happening to them. It meant everything to her. And it was about the time when I was working on the mountain lion that I ran into her.

I went to see her, and then I was put on the board. I was very active there for five years. I got also through them the money for the studies on the mountain lion from the Whittell Fund. George Whittell was a man who lived up on Tahoe. He had two magazines beside his bed at night: one was Defenders of Wildlife, and one was Audubon. He turned out to be a very well-to-do man. When he died, he left some forty million dollars. He had a very simple will, and it just said, "To Defenders of Wildlife, National Audubon, and the SPCA."

I stayed on the board until they agreed to put up $90,000 for Carl Koford's study of the California mountain lion, which was a three-to-four-year study. Then I started the Committee to Save the Mountain Lion.

Riess: Were there other women on that board?

Owings: Yes, and I got Beulah Edmiston there. She's one who has been very active in the tule elk, a woman of great inner strength and, in a sense, nobility in fighting for things. She ran nearly everything from her own house, and just had a committee of names. At that point they were going through the business of the tule elk in the Owens Valley.

Nat and I went down once and flew over the Owens Valley. There's a picture of the shadow of our plane--not that I knew that at the time--and when Audubon afterwards asked me to write an article about the Owens Valley tule elk, I began with that photograph of the plane crossing the desert there.

At any rate, Beulah Edmiston was so sharp--I mean, she believed so earnestly that she became sharp and would become angry with people. That wasn't quite my way of doing things, although I think now as I'm getting old I'm getting sharper. But I try to have things be achieved in a reasonable and understanding way, rather than suggesting that people are being crooked or things of that sort, which came up quite often on that board, and which is too bad.

Riess: What other points of view were there on the board? Was it like-minded, or among the Defenders of Wildlife were there different kinds of defenders?

Owings: Yes, there was a woman who had a beaver pond, a sort of sanctuary. She used to come to the meetings and we'd see photographs of her beavers.

We bought the Aravaipa Canyon in Arizona, and there was a great deal of battling about that because there was so much that we really needed to do. There were so many hot issues that needed funds to be put into them, and people to be hired to work on them, that it seemed to me at the time that it was a mistake, putting all the money that we had at that time in Aravaipa. Because right after that they began killing lions all outside it.

But they had a colorful character, Edward Abbey--have you heard of him?

Riess: Yes.

Owings: Great charmer. Of course, <u>impossible</u> to work with, but a delightful guy and lots of local color. We hired him to be in charge, and he had a truck and a horse. Most of the farmers who had little inholdings there very soon couldn't bear him because he'd go by and see their wives while they were off running cattle! They ran cattle in this place that was supposed to be a wildlife preserve, which didn't please me very much.

So, lots of funny things happened there. And finally he went off on his own. I guess he couldn't ever take anyone very long. I don't know what he's doing now. He was writing a book the last time I talked to him. [Abbey died in 1989.]

Riess: I should think there would be a lot of characters who would be difficult to work with, single issue people.

Owings: Yes. There's a man in Tucson who was perhaps the strongest of all. He is no longer alive, Edward Steel. He would tend to call people at eleven at night, anyplace in the United States, and talk to them for a full hour. People got madder and madder, and of course Nat got mad at me. You know, we'd be way off in Timbuktu, and somehow someone would have given him my number. Suddenly this man would arrive on the phone!

Nat would sometimes jump on him and say, "Do you know what time it is?" Bang! And of course then I'd have to make up for it by saying how sorry I was, although it was really difficult. He had much that was good. He was suspicious of everyone, though, and he caused lots of trouble, but there were good things too. It was a question of the balance between personalities.

Riess: Do you think that you were on that board because of your particular diplomatic qualities?

Owings: Oh no, I hadn't defined myself that way. I was defining myself, perhaps, in contrast to the woman I just spoke to you about, or Ian McMillan. I got Ian there, and he even fought. He punched a man at a board meeting.

Riess: Well, that's why I was asking whether among those Defenders there were such different kinds that the Defenders would be at each other.

Owings: Yes, it was pretty rough going. And finally I just stopped one day and realized all I was thinking about was not the issues, which is why I was on that board and always had to go to Washington for meetings, and there would be other, smaller meetings, and I was just racing off there all the time, and couldn't do it because I was doing a lot of other things at the time. I suddenly realized I'd gotten to the point where I was thinking entirely of the personalities involved and the friction between them, and the different points of view, and how there was no strong leadership there.

They had some very good people. Dick Pough, for instance, he was the man who stopped the feather people from taking the egret feathers for their hats. He's been written up quite a bit lately in the nature magazines, and I'm glad to see that.

Riess: Was that a board where bringing in money was part of the responsibility of the board members?

Owings: Not much. There was a treasurer, who died recently, but it wasn't the way it is now in the big conservation organizations. You know, they have a committee that's really aiming at that particular thing or they can't keep alive. We didn't have that to begin with. Of course, I'm sure they have it much better now than they did then.

Riess: Then where did they get their money?

Owings: From people like the man in Tahoe. Every once in a while. If we'd get a thousand dollars we used to feel, "My god, isn't this great? Isn't this great!"

Riess: I read a book called Slaughter the Animals, Poison the Earth by Jack Olson, and he dedicated it to the "little old ladies in tennis shoes," and contrasted them with "hardheaded scientists."

Owings: That was probably during that time that I was on the Defenders. I don't know what the date of the book was.

Riess: It was published in 1971. But "little old ladies in tennis shoes"? I wondered whether this was an image that you had to actively dispel in a group like that?

Owings: At the time of my beginning with Defenders the scientist played less of a role, and it was more an emotional response to species that were endangered. The black-footed ferret we had a great deal to do with. A woman wrote an article which was first published in The New Yorker, an excellent article, and then we hired her to do another article. They were fast disappearing, and the public really hadn't become aware of them or what they were. But I know what he's talking about, and I think that we're coming down to better common sense.

I don't always go along with the scientists. I used to think all scientists were pure at heart and wanted to save lives, but that, of course, isn't the way it is. The term that goes along with scientist now, primarily, is one of management. Management of wildlife. And sometimes that management is wise and needed, and other times it isn't needed at all, but it gives them something to do, and they get funds from the Fish and Wildlife Service and so on.

National Parks Foundation, 1968-1969

Riess: Tell me about the National Parks Foundation Board. You were appointed to that by Lyndon Johnson for 1968-1969?

Owings: Well, it wasn't an active thing. I'm often listed on the board because I was at the founding of it. It was primarily Stewart Udall who wanted me to be on it, and Laurance Rockefeller was on it and had been putting up funds to get its groundwork going. He was a friend. I think I have a picture in my papers there [The Bancroft Library] of all of us in Washington. Also on it was the man who was president of the Bank of America, [Rudolph] Peterson.

It was really more deciding how to construct it, that first year, which we did. There was a very nice young man who was the head of it, the executive person involved, whose name right now escapes me. I didn't do very much; I went to meetings. We went to meetings out in the Grand Tetons, and went twice to the Rockefellers' lake there [Jenny Lake] which they've now given to the parks. We were trying to have gifts made to us to buy parks or parts of parks that couldn't be obtained in other ways. I was so much in favor of what they were doing, and later I still had their agenda, all those papers someplace, and I took them to Bill Mott here in California [director of the California Parks Foundation] and said [whispers], "Look what I've got! Use this! It has a lot of strength and wisdom to it." And it did!

The issues that we dealt with at that time--I can think of one which will make you laugh, and you might as well have a laugh:

I had gone down the Colorado River with Nat and we'd boarded at Lee's Ferry. There is a little old boat there that is three-quarters sunk. It was a dory, one of those used for a while just to cross the river there. The dories we were in were just sort of tagged along. We climbed through this wet, soggy dory to get to our own dories. The next time I went to one of those meetings they said, "We want to put up $12,000--" it sounded like a lot of money at that time, though now it doesn't--"to refurbish the old dory that crossed the river there." I looked at them and I said, "Twelve thousand dollars? To refurbish that boat?"

I had an illusion that there were many examples in national parks where summer jobs, such as refurbishing this boat, could be offered to young kids who would get a lot of pleasure out of them, that would be fun for a lot of kids. They'd have their way paid there, they'd have their food paid for, they'd make a small amount.

I said, "Why in thunder don't you get students to work on a thing of this sort? You'll have to drag it out first, and the thing's going to fall all apart, just like the submerged figures from the Egyptian tombs, the minute you get them out of the water." [laughs] Well, I made such an impression on them that

they voted against it, and I've often wondered if maybe I made a mistake. Here we could have some soggy old thing dried up like an Egyptian tomb figure. [laughter]

X A FRIEND TO THE SEA OTTERS, 1968 TO THE PRESENT

[Interview 8: November 7, 1988]

First Sighting

Lage: Now, we are going to turn to the sea otters.

Owings: Yes. I don't know, Ann, whether as you drove down the coast before you crossed Bixby Bridge you saw a rock on one side of Bixby Bridge where we placed a plaque when we dedicated the "First Scenic Highway"? Nat and I had a plaque made in bronze with a line from Jeffers, and Lady Bird Johnson dedicated it. I have the speech that I wrote for her. She gave the whole speech.

Well, then the plaque was stolen. And that rock has just been sitting there. It's an ugly-looking rock. The only reason I chose it--I had them move it about twelve miles from our property up there--was because it was covered with lichen and I thought, "Isn't this great?" It had orange and yellow and splotches of green. It was just lovely. Before we were through, and before Lady Bird Johnson had the opportunity to dedicate it, someone had painted it purple. But at any rate, it has been out there for a long time.

It was at Bixby because right at that spot where the rock is is where the sea otters were first publicly recognized, fifty years ago.

Lage: When it was first recognized that they had returned?

Owings: Yes. Some of the local people had seen an otter or two. Some didn't know what they were seeing. It never sort of crept out.

Dr. [Carl] Hubbs down at Scripps [Institution of Oceanography] wrote me a letter about the otters when I first took up that cause and told me about when he first saw an otter in 1915, and what it was doing. At any rate, we were more or less

under the impression at that point that the otters had not survived the fur trade. So, it was exciting to see around a hundred otters all rafting together, the thing that does not happen very often even though we have considerably more than that number now.

When the otters were first rediscovered, I was living in Illinois, and that was in 1938, and it came out in Life magazine, a big picture of otters. I studied them. I had no idea what this was going to do to my life.

Lage: You had an interest even then back in Illinois?

Owings: No. I read it because I was always interested in wildlife. I hadn't really thought about the otters before. At any rate, I was not around at the time of the excitement when these otters were first seen.

The first time that I ever saw an otter was after we came out here to live, not here in Big Sur but in the Carmel Highlands in a stone house that was adjacent to Gibson Beach. I was down on the beach and suddenly I saw something astonishing. The year was 1949. I wrote it down afterwards because I was so astonished.

> ...in a towering, transparent wave that was curling inward to plunge and break in this thin, crystal sheeting of water against the evening sun, my first sea otter stretched horizontal in silhouette for one hammock-swung moment.

Lage: Is that a quote?

Owings: [laughs] That's a quote from myself. I put it in the Otter Raft.

In 1941, signs were erected along the Coast Highway to announce that this was a sea otter refuge, and in 1959 the area was enlarged. On the signs it said that firearms were prohibited between the road and the beach. There are areas where land stretches out quite a ways into the beach where people have forgotten about that sign. At any rate, that is a sign that even today you will find along there.

This was a time when we were talking about otters, but I hadn't rolled up my sleeves about them yet because I had gone through that thing with the sea lion, and I had gone through the thing with the mountain lions.

Confronting the Abalone Fishermen, with Ian McMillan, 1968

Owings: In 1968 Fred Farr called me, and said, "Hey, Margaret, I'm driving down to San Luis Obispo to a Senate Natural Resources Committee meeting with the fishermen. Don't you want to come?" Well, I had a moment of hesitation, and then it just seemed logical that I come.

Lage: Did he tell you what the agenda was?

Owings: I knew it was about sea otters and abalone fishermen being angry.

Lage: So you were aware that this was an issue that was brewing?

Owings: Yes, but it wasn't an issue that I had worked on really before. I had, of course, become very incensed at things I read in the newspapers, about what the abalone fishermen felt about the otters. Instead of being a remarkable animal close to extinction, it was to them only a predator in competition with their resource, the abalone.

Well, when we got down to the San Luis Obispo hall, I was surrounded by fishermen and divers. But in the crowd I saw the two McMillan brothers. I hadn't met Eben before, but I had met Ian, who had helped me with the mountain lions. So I moved over and sat beside him.

He was getting good and mad at the fishermen, and I liked that, and I was getting good and mad, too. But I had to represent something. You couldn't go down there just as a citizen. So I thought up the idea that I would represent the Point Lobos League, which I had worked on for many years in getting those beaches that are adjacent to Point Lobos. No one questioned it when I gave that reason for being down there.

It was Ian McMillan who made a statement that I wrote down in my notebook. I liked the statement. I like the way he thought. He said, "This remnant population of sea otters now surviving along the California coast, even though it be but a remnant, represents one of our greatest conservation achievements." That pleased me, and in a way it made me think, "Am I going really to start to work on this?" Because obviously the otters needed a friend.

Over the years, I had worked with Ian on the non-use of 1080 poison. We felt absolutely the same about that. I had worked with him on the mountain lion bounty. I had worked with him on

the shooting of deer in Yosemite Park. And, of course, the condors were his specialty.

When I left the State Park Commission--later, under Reagan, the Parks and Recreation Commission--I wrote to Reagan. I told him I felt that I had done my share. I had worked six years on it and had worked very hard. "Could I make a suggestion for a choice?" He was very nice about it. I said Ian McMillan, and he chose him. That gave me a sense of satisfaction.

Lage: Would you talk a little more about the McMillans? They seem so untypical, maybe, of ranchers in the Central Coast.

Owings: I don't know whether I told you about the time Ian took Nat and myself and we saw the baby condor learning to fly. We had talked often about it, and so we went over to Shandon. He invited us for the night, and the McMillans gave us a beautiful dinner.

The next morning we packed up a lunch, and it was almost as if we were driven blindfolded there, because he didn't want anyone to know where this nest was. We drove to an area called High Mountain that had a depth of a canyon, and in this canyon were great points of sandstone and rock. It was the last known nesting area for the condor. This is something that was formed way back when in geology.

On the top of this point, which must have been easily 200 feet off the bottom of the canyon, we saw some sticks. Ian kept saying, "See any movement on top of that point?"

Nat and I studied with our binoculars, and we finally saw two birds approaching from the north, high up, circling in the distance. They were just dots, and they circled slowly, slowly together, until they came right down by the nest. One of them then landed on the nest, and the little bird got up. The mother fed it, and then it pecked it, and the mother worked around the nest--we assumed it was the mother--and the father was circling, circling almost even with the nest.

Suddenly then the mother wanted to teach the little one how to fly. So it poked at it with its head. The little one began to flap its wings pathetically in the nest. Then as it flapped it began to go up a little higher. It looked down and saw it was rising up above its nest--you could read its mind--and it got up higher and higher, and the two parent birds were circling right around it almost to touch it. It must have gone up forty feet into the air, when suddenly it looked down. What it saw was a long ways down there.

Its flight started to fail. Its little wings got a little weak. The mother just guided it down, right beside it, and it landed on the nest again. Isn't that extraordinary?

That, what I have described to you, is why I have been opposed to having the condors in zoos. They'll never be able to learn those fundamental, wonderful things the condors did. And Ian McMillan used to see red when he thought of condors being put in zoos. Mind you, by this time there were so few left that they thought they would save them. Ian felt it was a tragic thing. He knew of the strychnine that had been put in dead sheep bodies. He knew of the reason why the birds were being killed, being found dead. A lot of poison in bodies to catch the coyotes that these sheepmen dislike. Anyway, that was one of those things that I will always remember, with Ian.

Ian McMillan had an eightieth birthday party. They gave it to him as a surprise. He said, "Now everything I've fought for is in a shambles: the few remaining condors in zoos, 1080 poison returned to public lands, the quail diminishing without the right habitat, and the mountain lion back on the trophy list." It was true, and these happened to be the issues I cared about also, except that he was much closer to the condor than I, and he wasn't connected as much with the sea otters.

Lage: Did his brother get as involved as he?

Owings: He and his brother quarrelled. Someone [David Darlington] has called me because he was writing a book on the brother [Eben McMillan] and asked me if I knew why they had quarrelled. They couldn't seem to find out from anyone. I didn't know why.

Lage: It was a break, rather than just a quarrel?

Owings: They quarrelled and just didn't agree, and so avoided one another. But once in a while they were seen in the same place, the same room. So I know very little about Eben.

Forming a Citizen's Committee

Owings: Now I've got to swing back to the otters because here I was sitting beside Ian again. During that time, the abalone fishermen grew so excited that they were shouting, and they were all shouting for the same thing, but they interrupted one another in their shouting. Some of them stood on their seats to wave their arms.

Lage: During their own testimony?

Owings: During their testimony. But when I got up I said very little, but I said it, and they saw what an evil person I was. [laughter]

At the end of it the committee did not make any decision about whether they would take this up as a bill or give it any consideration, but a man named Dr. Thomas Poulter [scientific director of the Stanford Research Institute] presented a talk on the propagation of abalone.

Poulter went up with [Admiral Richard E.] Byrd and saved Byrd's life, and I have the diary of his trip and it is fascinating. I was very friendly with Poulter. He also taught me about walruses and took me up to Coyote Point when they had a baby walrus. It wasn't well, and I didn't know that I was going to ever be very fond of walruses, but this one came up, rested its head right here on my shoulder, and looked up into my eyes, knowing that Poulter was going to give it a shot of some antibiotics or something. Then it wanted to stay there, and I patted it and looked into those eyes. It was another one of those wonderful experiences.

Lage: Not something you think of with walruses.

Owings: Not at all. But that is an example of the different kinds of people I have worked with throughout these years that I have worked in this wildlife field.

At the close of this hearing, the director of Fish and Game testified in favor of our point of view.

Lage: Who was that?

Owings: Walter Shannon. I have a letter from him which I sent out to everyone. He testified in favor of letting the otters alone because he knew that so many of them had been shot. He had records, and he handed them to me, of the numbers of otters the year before, and the number that there were now. The numbers had diminished markedly.

At any rate, between Fish and Game and this senate committee and Fred Farr, they selected a citizens' committee to carry this on further, including fishermen and someone representing the abalone industry and someone who was a sportsman.

Ken Norris was called in--he wasn't at that first hearing--and Ken Norris became a great friend of mine. And Dr. Aryan Roest

from San Luis Obispo, who changed his studies for a while. I liked him in the beginning and didn't later. But I suppose I like him again now.

Lage: He's back on the right track?

Owings: He recently wrote a very nice article about otters, sort of poetic and sympathetic and loving. It was published in one of the national magazines. I just cheered, and then I felt better about him.

So then I wanted to have someone else. I hadn't met him yet, but his name was Dr. James Mattison, Jr. He was a surgeon in Salinas, and in his free time he was a diver. He started in on underwater photography and he was really the first one to do underwater photography of the sea otters. His work was in the National Geographic, published with a large article written by Karl Kenyon. I asked him if he could leave his surgery behind; if we would ever have a meeting, would he come? And he came faithfully. We had meetings down in San Luis Obispo; we had meetings up in Sacramento.

At one of the meetings down at San Luis Obispo there was a wiry little guy who jumped on the table because I made a statement. (They were just waiting for me to make a statement.) I pointed out the numbers of the otters and how the numbers had diminished within the year. He jumped up and pointed at me, and he said, "I know what you're thinking; you're thinking that we shot them. But I want to tell you that it's mighty hard to shoot an otter from a rocking boat."

Lage: He had tried, obviously.

Let me just clarify what this committee was that we have been talking about.

Owings: It was a committee to talk this over and see if we could reach an understanding.

Lage: Did the Senate Natural Resources Committee form it?

Owings: They were involved in selecting it, but they were not involved at that time in any hearings. That came later.

Lage: So it was just a citizens' committee to try and reach a consensus.

Owings: Yes. That period was at a time when a single fishing boat could come in with 500 pounds of abalone. They were the red abalone, the larger and most sought after, and they brought in the largest

sums of money. They would pass one little otter floating along on its back. It had an abalone and it had cracked the shell because it had a little rock on its tummy to crack the shell, and it was eating the abalone. That was all they needed to see absolute red. The otter had become the culprit for their overfishing is what it amounted to.

Fishermen had, for example, at that time 223 boats out, which was quite a lot for that area down there. There is nothing like that now. The numbers of otters that were counted at that time were 664. The pounds of abalone harvested by fishermen in 1916 to 1949 was in excess of 41 million pounds. We can't say the pounds of abalone eaten by the otters; although that was one of the things the fishermen kept shouting at us, we were not qualified to do that.

We were also learning for the first time what the otters ate, the urchins which they could eat with such ease, and the mussel shells and the turban snail. There were about 42 items that Jud Vandevere counted, which we used in our Otter Raft a number of times.

Lage: Now were the studies going on at this point? Was Jud Vandevere doing his research?

Owings: He was beginning to. We didn't really begin that until I started the Friends of the Sea Otter, which was very shortly.

Another comment about the situation down there at that time was that all divers, or those working on the boats, when they were going to sea carried rifles. This was reported by people in Cambria to us, and it made us distinctly uneasy about everything.

Lage: Did you ever develop a way to communicate with the abalone fishermen? Did you ever feel that you touched any of them or moved them from one point of view?

Owings: There were moments that I did, but very few, because they were still livid with rage about these otters. In fact, there weren't many otters down there; the number of otters that I gave weren't just down there, they were all along their entire range, up to Santa Cruz and down to Cambria.

I was thoroughly attacked by the divers. I made a statement: "It is not a question of a few abalone divers and a few otters. Instead it is the problem of human greed and what greed does to the world." That came out in print in the San Luis Obispo papers, and it was not welcomed.

Forming Friends of the Sea Otter

Owings: When I came back after one of these meetings--Nat had been away, and so I hadn't been able to talk to him about it--I told him about it. He walked over to that north window, because we always made our decisions at that north window.

I had written a letter to the Monterey Peninsula Herald, and it was published in the Herald, and the Herald was very sympathetic with what I said. I have the letter here. [see following page] Instead of just putting it in the opinion page, the Herald brought it out and put it on the front page, which was darn nice of them. They gave it a heading of "Do Sea Otters Have Any Friends?" When I read that, and I read the title of it, I saw I was in it. We stood there, and I said, "I'm going to have to form Friends of the Sea Otter, Nat."

We thought of all the different things we were going to do, because we had trips planned, all kinds of things planned, and you aren't friends of the sea otter while you have a heavy schedule, which I did have. I also was on other boards in the East. I was in the East quite a bit, and we had the place in New Mexico that we were working on, the adobe.

At any rate, we agreed, and I made the comment to him that I thought that probably we could solve this problem in a couple of years.

Lage: This was 1968?

Owings: Yes.

Lage: Was Nat always supportive of this kind of effort? He knew what you were getting into?

Owings: Yes, yes. He was very supportive. Whenever I picked up a thing, he supported it. Though he was very busy himself, he gave me his complete backing.

I called then Dr. James Mattison, asking him to join with me and form a trust. We became trustees of a trust instrument and defined the purpose of the trust. This was 1968, and I sat down at our dining table and designed a mother and pup. Anything I start, I have to draw it first. And so I drew it. Here it is. [interruption] That is my stationery. [See following page.]

Lage: Do they still use that?

OPINION PAGE

Background and Interpretation of the News

Monterey Peninsula Herald

Monterey, California, Monday, March 11, 1968.

Do Sea Otters Have Any Friends?

Editor's note: Mrs. Margaret Owings is a member of the State Parks Commission and an ardent conservationist. She and her husband, architect Nathaniel Owings, reside in Big Sur. In the following article, written for The Herald, she discusses the controversy over sea otters vs. abalone.

By MARGARET OWINGS

I am glad to have my name connected with the sea otter for I place this little animal high on my list of special values. The return of the otter to the immediate area of our coastal waters has given thousands of visitors a rare pleasure — and we, living along the coast, can feel privileged to be able to watch its delightful activities.

Yet I am concerned for the welfare of the otter. As has been true with practically every wild animal in the vicinity of man, the otter is thought to compete with an economic value that man claims as his own.

So it has been with the abalone industry which considers the sea otter "a predator" to their resource. "The vicious little otter," they say, "has reduced the abalone to an extent that fishermen can no longer make a living."

It is true, that "their resource" is being depleted. Last year, abalone landings were at the highest tonnage ever recorded. This year, the industry, returning to the abalone beds, finds commercial size shells few and far between. The otter becomes the culprit.

The sea otter herds have been moving south. They are increasing their range but they are not increasing their population. Why, might we ask, has the otter population dwindled in the last ten years when it should be increasing some 15 per cent each year?

In 1957 the count was 638. In 1967 the count was 562. Although survey counts can be inaccurate, these numbers clearly state that the otter is not quite holding its own during the past decade. Why?

Dead otter, washed ashore, carry gunshot wounds. The otter speciman at the Moro Bay Museum of Natural History carries 14 knife wounds. In simple words, the attrition may well relate to man.

When I made this comment to men from the abalone industry, one retorted — "I suppose you think it is due to the industry. Well, maybe it is. The industry has a motive." And then he added, "but it's mighty hard to shoot an otter from a rocking boat."

Additional factors also threaten the otter. One is pollution poured into the sea and spreading out over the waters. Particularly oil, coating the fur of the otter, causes death without respite. (Keeping the Humble Oil Refinery out of Monterey Bay was a protective measure for the otter.) As we increase these industries that (either by accident or experience) pour oils and other pollutants into the waters, we decrease the otter's chance for survival.

The third threat to the otter was described by Eleanor Lambert, in her article, "Sea otter for Milady's Coat," published in the March 4 Herald. This year the government has permitted the sale of 1,000 otter pelts from Alaska. Previous to this sale, sea otter fur had no legal market. The otter was totally protected. For 57 years no woman could buy this truly fabulous fur.

That one skin alone could bring a price of $2,300 at the recent auction held in Seattle is a play with dollar numbers which may sound too attractive to the poacher.

Our otter herds along the California coast are still very much protected by law with severe fines and imprisonment for any apprehended violations. Our Department of Fish and Game cannot adequately patrol the habitat of the otter although no body of men are more dedicated to its protection.

In San Luis Obispo the scientists from Polytech unfolded an otter skin and passed it around the room for each of us to handle. It was rich and beautiful and had two bullet holes.

This is why I am concerned.

Owings: Not now. No. They just have printing. This was a baby otter. It was hard for people to understand what that was, but it was the first one I'd ever drawn.

I started it personally. I started it by writing to my friends; although I formed a letter, I always had the name written in my penmanship, and I always signed it. I worked on it here on the dining table. I hadn't really gotten anyone else then. Dr. Mattison, after all, had full time duty as a surgeon. He wasn't going to do any foolish little things like that [letterwriting]. I did the whole thing myself for a while. We now have our executive secretary, and our membership secretary, and our head of the Sea Otter Center, and our biologist.

Lage: Now, how did you start? You formed the trust?

Owings: We formed the trust, and then set about talking with Jud Vandevere, who knew more about the sea otter and sea life around the coastal waters than any single person in our region.

We began with Jud, and he came down, and we did a lot of talking. I went out with him and watched things. That summer he became the naturalist for Point Lobos, and so he was drawing people's attention to the few sea otters that were there.

Then there was a man by the name of [Richard] Peterson who had drawn my attention, who had his masters in marine biology and had taken an interest in the otters and the elephant seals at Ano Nuevo. We engaged him; Nat and I put up the grant money for many years that began with this nice Peterson young man. We were working together, and I was very, very satisfied with him, and then something went wrong. He wrote me a letter. He killed himself. It was just as we were getting hold of the thing. This young man couldn't have been a finer person and truly interested. I found the letters that he wrote me when I was looking at all this.

In 1969 there was the Santa Barbara oil spill. Most people in California living along the coast, especially in the south, were very much alarmed about it. They were alarmed first because the oil got on the beaches and they couldn't lie there and take sunbaths! [laughter]

Lage: That was the first consideration.

Owings: Then it became the oiled birds, the oiled cormorants, which was a tragedy, and some oiled sea lions. We did not know that any sea otters had reached that area at the time that happened. Had they

FRIENDS OF THE SEA OTTER

BIG SUR

Original letterhead for
Friends of the Sea Otter
drawing by Margaret Owings

Below--Mother sea otter holding pup
1970 drawing by Margaret Owings

reached there, it would have killed them very shortly, because of the nature of their fur.

Lage: Did you know that at the time, that the fur was--

Owings: Yes, we did. They don't have a blubber like the seals, so this incredible depth of fur, which is described in the Otter Raft, would get clogged. They would try to lick this toxic oil off, and they couldn't clean themselves, and then they would get hypothermia because the cold water got down to their skin. They could die in a number of hours. But that alarmed us about the otters, because we knew that these spills could happen anywhere.

Lage: This widened your concern.

Owings: Yes, from being concerned about the abalone fishermen, then the concern about oil moved in. We had a great deal of tanker traffic up and down the coast, and a number of accidents did take place, but they weren't ever severe enough to cause the damage that had been caused by the oil tanker, Torrey Canyon, on the west coast of Cornwall. That, and the big oil spill on the Brittany coast, were examples that were burned into our minds and alarmed us a great deal.

Defeating Grunsky's Senate Bill 442, 1970

Owings: In 1970, when Fred Farr was no longer in office as senator--Senator [Donald] Grunsky had defeated him--I went up and talked with Senator Grunsky about the sea otters. He firmly told me that if he were ever going to introduce a bill he would discuss it with me carefully and hear my point of view. I believed him. He then suddenly announced a bill, all printed and out, for the fishermen. The idea was that all otters could be "taken" outside their refuge.

Now, when the refuge was established it was not a place to keep otters in, it was a place to especially guard them. At that point, the otters from Bixby and so on had gradually been moving south. That's why the abalone fishermen were so up in arms, because they would see them further south.

Lage: But they were protected outside their range?

Owings: They were protected in different measures, but this bill made it quite dangerous, indeed, for them.

Senator Grunsky demonstrated his bias in Senate Bill 442. It was based on the abalone controversy over the sea otter. I put together a flyer. (I was satisfied with it because it was my own wording.) I called it "A Judgment of Values: Where Do You Place Yours?" It has on the cover the first photo we ever had of a mother otter, clutching her pup and looking straight up into the camera. It was taken by Karl Kenyon during his studies up in Alaska. [see facing page]

I put down the points, and I got the mailing list from the Sierra Club, and I had these all printed. We had so little time because it was going to come up so soon. I didn't have people to help me. I didn't know enough.

Lage: You had founded the trust, but you didn't really have a volunteer staff yet?

Owings: No, not really. I had a woman who helped me with my mail, that was all.

At any rate, we sent out a mailing, and children all over California, believe me, picked this up, and started writing letters to Grunsky on lined paper, very carefully written and always illustrated with a drawing at the bottom or at the top saying, "Stop killing the otters. Don't kill otters." It began to cause Senator Grunsky to have something close to a nervous breakdown.

Lage: Do you have any sense of how this got picked up? You sent out these mailings to Sierra Club lists?

Owings: Yes, then the newspapers.

Lage: It struck a chord.

Owings: Yes, it just caught hold, like wildfire.

Lage: Did you hear from Senator Grunsky?

Owings: Oh yes. I called him, and he had nothing to say. I called him on the fact that Jim Mattison and I had gone to his office to get him to agree that he would not take any steps without discussing it with us, and he just suddenly came out with this bill.

Lage: Did he continue his support for the bill?

Owings: He said he would change it and take the word "take" out. He said he didn't know the word "take"--in other words, that you could "take" otters outside their refuge--he didn't know that that could

Friends of the Sea Otter mailing, 1970

A JUDGEMENT OF VALUES
WHERE DO YOU PLACE YOUR'S?

Senator Grunsky demonstrates his judgement in Senate Bill 442

Based on the Abalone Industry and sea otter controversy

THE BILL: "Provides that sea otters may be taken outside the Calif. Sea Otter Refuge under a permit or by the Dept. of Fish & Game, provided there has been a public hearing by the Fish & Game Commission, which has been given no less than 30 days notice, and there has been a specific finding by the Commission that this action will not endanger the sea otter resource. Prohibits both sport and commercial taking of abalone from the Refuge area."

THE CALIFORNIA SEA OTTER IS A "FULLY PROTECTED MAMMAL" – following two centuries of harvesting an excess of 9000 pelts per year. His near extinction by 1911 prompted the Fur Seal Treaty to halt further exploitation of the few remaining animals.

Today, Marine Biologists consider the CALIFORNIA SEA OTTER "a unique colony of marine animals which should be protected". Yet, this Bill proposes to make further inroads on this fragile remnant.

FACTS ABOUT BILL 442:

1. The term "TAKEN" means that otters may be: "hunted – pursued – caught – captured or killed". (Section 86, Fish & Game Code)
2. Taken "UNDER A PERMIT or BY FISH & GAME" -- may be interpreted to mean that commercial interests could be permitted to harvest otters for their pelts; otters could be captured for zoos, etc.
3. That otters "may be taken OUTSIDE the Calif. Sea Otter Refuge" is not a safeguard. The Refuge covers 100 coastal miles, whereas, otters range over 145 miles. TOTAL OFFICIAL SEA OTTER POPULATION COUNT = 1014 It is estimated that more than 1/3 of these otters are OUTSIDE the Refuge.
4. Calif. Sea Otter Refuge was established in 1957 to protect otters, not to limit their movement within a prescribed area. It has not been proven that otters (publicly rediscovered 1938) have used up the forage of their Refuge – although the Abalone Industry from 1916 – 1939 had landed in excess of 41 million lbs. of abalone along the Monterey coast. This heavy reduction of commercially available abalone caused the Industry to push south to Morro Bay where it flourished until its present decline. Recently, the sea otter has been blamed for cleaning up this over-harvest of the Area.

THE SEA OTTER AND ABALONE HAVE LONG SHARED A BALANCED ECOLOGY. THIS BALANCE HAS CHANGED DUE TO ABALONE OVER-HARVEST BY MAN.

WHERE DO YOU PLACE YOUR VALUES?

A small gourmet Industry – the red abalone?
A rare marine animal, diving in the waves – the sea otter?

(Although the Bill may be amended before it enters legislative committee – a broad expression of public judgement is needed to reach Senator Grunsky and members of the two committees.)

mean "kill." That isn't anything that I necessarily believe, but that's what he fell back on. Well, he didn't remove the word "take"--you would have thought then he would have come out in the newspaper about that because the newspapers were filled with this --he didn't until just before the hearings.

We had a hearing up in Sacramento. Nat hired a Greyhound bus, and all the excited otter people filled it. They had placards. They had pins with a picture of an otter on it, and Friends of the Sea Otter written under it.

Nat and I chartered a plane and went around and picked up people, and scientists who were going to testify. We all got up there. It couldn't have been more successful. The scientists were simply wonderful.

Could I read a little short item I put in the Raft? This is from Dr. [Robert T.] Orr, the associate director of the California Academy of Science. He said in "Testimony proposing a bill to prohibit commercial taking of abalone:"

> [reading] We are living in an age when our nation is becoming very conservation-minded and trying to undo the great damage that man had done to his environment. Senate Bill 442 is so far out of tune with this concept that it might well have been conceived in the 19th century. What will Senate Bill 442 do? It proposes to curb sea otters, which are barely past the danger point. And why? So that a small group of market hunters who are commercializing on something that belongs to all of us can continue their exploitation to produce a gourmet item. These big sea snails are not a basic food. Their price is out of range of the average citizen. Furthermore, the commercial hunters are not replenishing things that belong to you and me. I want my abalone to stay in the sea for otters or any other creatures that won't exploit them.

Lage: Had the Department of Fish and Game changed its stance by then?

Owings: Yes. Shannon was put out, and Arnett came in.

Lage: Was Shannon under Reagan?

Owings: No. When Reagan came in, he gave the position to Ray Arnett. Ray Arnett saw red, white, and blue when he heard of otters. He also saw other colors when he heard of mountain lions. In other words, everything we were working towards, he was on the opposite side.

Lage: Then you had to battle Fish and Game instead of having them as allies?

Owings: We had to battle them, and that was a big, big job.

Lage: Let's just follow through on SB 442. Was it defeated, or withdrawn?

Owings: It was withdrawn. A good many fishermen came up, too, and they weren't able to express themselves. Of course, we had really worked on getting ready, and we had such wonderful speakers get up and say their part and sit down. I spoke as well.

Lage: So that hearing had its effect?

Owings: That hearing had its effect.

Films on the Otter, and Growing Public Interest

Owings: Following this, in 1971 Jacques and Phil Cousteau came to the Monterey Bay and put together a film called The Unsinkable Sea Otter. They used some of Jud Vandevere's film that he had taken. (He was working for us after Peterson had died.)

There was a little otter that they called Esprit. It became so tame it would come right up to the boat, and they could feed it, and it was right there so that it was wonderful to photograph. And yet, the tragedy was--we learned from that too--that the otters became so associated with man, really in a loving, warm, friendly way, that then man can kill them easily. It was not until the Cousteaus left that little Esprit was washed ashore with bullet holes. He is in that film quite a bit.

Lage: What brought the Cousteaus out here?

Owings: That's the kind of thing that they were interested in.

Lage: But the sea otters must have attracted enough publicity?

Owings: Oh yes. It was publicized nationally, and it was in all the national magazines, and especially the conservation magazines.

Bill Bryan, who was one of our members, who is a lawyer, was a very good underwater photographer for otters. He later did the film, Clowns of the Sea. It's just delightful. He'd say to me,

"Margaret, you don't have to talk about these things and write about all these things. Let's let the otter sell himself. If we can just show him to the public, this little guy will make friends in any controversy. You don't find yourself wanting to embrace an abalone, do you?"

I took Bill's film to an Endangered Species Conference in Washington, D.C., for all animals. I was invited to represent otters, so I used his film without any words with it and then gave my own words and told my own story with it. It was on a big screen. Everyone began to feel seasick; I began to feel seasick as I stood up there and watched. I said, "You may feel seasick when you see this," because the water was turbulent and the otters were just rolling and turning and diving. The little otters, trying to dive, couldn't because they were like little balloons. They just couldn't get down before they would pop up again. But it had humor, and it was just delightful.

Previous to the Bryan film, Jim Mattison brought out a film in 1972. Back from Extinction he called it. A comprehensive booklet accompanied it so that it could be used by teachers. We were sending this film around to schools and public places as much as we could. Jim was, too. The teacher's manual was very, very well done.

Lage: This was all done by Jim?

Owings: Yes, Jim Mattison.

Lage: In his spare time?

Owings: Yes. His weekends, he just loved to be underwater. He and his wife have kayaks, and they go paddling around over there by the Coast Guard Station.

Protection for Otters--Federal Legislation, 1972

Owings: In 1972, Congress enacted the Marine Mammal Protection Act, and this was a very big step in protection and preservation of the sea otter population, because the state of California was in opposition to protecting the sea otters. When they put the Marine Mammal Protection Act into effect, they also had a board of advisors, the Marine Mammal Commission, and they were the ones we turned to continually. They were highly intelligent men. They were very, very good. Of course, it changed later, as appointments began to be made directly from the White House

without any connection to wildlife. The [Lyn] Nofzigers and those people got involved, but that's the way life is.

At any rate, we began well, with a man named John Twiss as the executive director of the Marine Mammal Commission. We were very friendly with him. Victor Sheffer was the first appointment. Starker Leopold told me how Victor almost didn't get it because he cared so much about animals such as the sea otter, and they didn't want anyone who might have any emotional connection with anything! The conversation that took place at that meeting was reported to me by Dr. Leopold.

The enactment of the Marine Mammal Protection Act ended up resting a great deal on Nathaniel Reed, and he became very much interested in the otters. I have talked to him on the phone a lot, and he came out here. We became great friends. He was influential in my receiving the Conservation Service Award from the Department of the Interior in 1975.

Lage: This is how you became friends? You didn't know him before?

Owings: Yes, yes. Just through this. He felt very strongly about it, and that was great.

Lage: How did you make that connection? Do you recall? He was with the Department of Interior.

Owings: Yes. He was the secretary of U.S. Fish and Wildlife.

Lage: Do you think you just went directly to him?

Owings: Probably. I remember one telephone call in the middle of it. I was telling him a lot of things. People don't go to the secretary and tell him a lot of things, but I would tell him a lot of things. I said, "Now, are you writing this down?" He said, "Margaret, if I didn't write this down, I'd go to the insane asylum." [laughter] "I write down everything that anyone ever says to me." We always had a good, friendly relationship, along with sharing our thoughts on this issue. Without him we would have had a very, very hard time.

Anyway, it was the next year that Congress enacted the Endangered Species Act. We took a very active part in this. We went and testified. I testified. Later when it came up for renewal, Carol Fulton [executive director of Friends of the Sea Otter, 1981-1989] testified another time. We went around and met all the congressmen. We went for several days to really know what was going on.

Lage: Was the Friends still sort of a one-woman show?

Owings: Betty Davis came to us in '75 [as executive secretary and principal scientist].

Lage: Did your board members play a role?

Owings: I was also on the board of the Environmental Defense Fund and used them a lot. Michael Bean, who was a wonderful wildlife biologist but also knew how to handle the legislators and spoke just excellently about things--he would boil things down to their essence--I learned a lot from him. I think we all learned a lot from him, bit by bit, those of us who came into contact with him. He came out here and stayed several days different times. So it was like that.

Lage: You sound as if you already had so many connections through other boards and people that you had met.

Owings: Oh yes, there were other people who were working on different issues, the dolphin, and the whale. Christine Stevens one time called me on the phone. She said, "Margaret, can you tell me something about the whales?" I told her a little bit, what I knew about the whales. That turned out to be the big thing of her life. She hurled herself into that, went to international meetings. She was one of the big factors.

It was interesting. When she gave me the call that time I had no idea she was going to pick it up and really run with the ball. She was a woman who cared about each individual animal, which I do too, and the cruelty to animals. She often used words like cruelty, whereas scientists often don't put the emotional reaction into words. She had the emotional reaction. She was splendid. A whole bunch of us got to know one another back there.

Lage: Did you work with Maxine McCloskey [founding president of the Whale Center] on the whales?

Owings: Yes. Maxine was here in Piedmont at that time. We didn't work as much with her because she was so lost with the whales,and we were so lost with the otters for the most part, but we certainly shared our thoughts and I think helped one another.

Lage: I have a note here, but maybe that's moving too far ahead, about the '75 campaign to declare the otter an endangered species.

Owings: That's what I was talking about, and that's the one where I said we got 75,000 signatures on petitions. We worked very, very hard

on that because we had people working against us, an abalone group.

Then the oil companies joined the abalone people, which startled us because we thought the abalone people might get together with us against the oil, because certainly spilled oil is not going to increase the abalone as a resource. It ruins the bottom of the ocean floor, the crevices of the rocks. It's a long, long time before the abalone will come back. There was a man who helped in putting up the offshore oil drilling platforms, and he became our arch enemy.

Lage: Did you have a lot of volunteers working on the petition drive? How did it get organized?

Owings: It was a good petition. My stepdaughter, Jennifer, did the drawing on it. It caught a lot of attention.

Firm Direction for the Friends from Dr. Betty Davis

Owings: It was in 1975 that Dr. Betty Davis joined the Friends of the Sea Otter as our executive secretary. She had a Ph.D. in zoology, and she became our principal scientist. She lived up at the Hastings Reserve with her husband, John Davis. This was up the Carmel Valley. Betty loved all animals. In her kitchen she had an owl that she had found as a little one and raised. It sat on a chandelier that was hanging down in her kitchen. You would go in there, and you were there a long time before you saw these great big eyes looking at you.

She had two baby foxes that had lost their mother. She raised them, then tried to let them go, and they wouldn't go away. There were dogs around. Then she just settled down and raised them. They had a square in the floor of their pen with wire on it where they were supposed to relieve themselves. Otherwise, they were up in shelves or on a branch of a tree inside this fox house. One time Betty looked down and there was a mountain lion looking up with his face almost at the wire floor. That really thrilled her.

Dr. Kenneth Norris called her "a magnificent professional." She leavened what she did with a great sense of humor, he said. She served with us for five years before her untimely death. She was involved with wildlife and the ecosystems and had a keen ability to analyze scientific and bureaucratic reports. We have that wonderful article that she did for the Pacific Discovery

[March-April 1977 issue, titled "The Southern Sea Otter Revisited"].

Lage: As executive secretary did she work with legislative issues?

Owings: Yes. She wasn't up in Sacramento the way Carol is, but then Carol is married to a lobbyist, so Carol is up there a lot.

Betty was excellent in going over reports, and then she would really go over them again, and it came to the point that her wisdom was such that the advisory board for the Marine Mammal Protection Act turned to her for her advice on all the things to do with the otter. This was really a point of pride, that we had someone they could turn to. She did it so incredibly accurately and with such strength.

Lage: How did she come to you? How did you find her?

Owings: Through a report she made for the Sierra Club on the possibility of supertankers entering Monterey Bay.

Her approach was to take a firm stand on a thing and just fight it to the quick, including the 1080 poison that they were putting out in the Hunter-Liggett area to kill ground squirrels. I went up to testify in King City, and she testified also. She became very friendly--though she never knew she was going to be friendly--with these army engineers. They suddenly found they had in their midst a woman of great character and strength who clearly knew what she was talking about. They took her up in their planes. They flew her over the entire Hunter-Liggett territories.

Also, she entered in a great deal too when we were fighting the introduction of large oil tankers for PG&E that could have been very damaging indeed.

I think when Betty came, her interests fanned out and included much more of the coastal marine habitat. In the beginning we tended to focus on the otter. Soon we were focusing on everything that was in the circle--the otter eating the urchin, the urchin killing the kelp, and the kelp feeding the abalone. Those things went right around in a circle. She caught hold of those and made a great deal of them, and did that very well, indeed. She unfortunately died of a brain tumor rather suddenly in 1981.

"Endangered" Pismo Clams

Owings: Then we come to the Pismo clams. I went down to Pismo Beach, where the Pismo Beach people were talking about the otters coming. There were some old-timers at Pismo Beach that still remembered one particular minus-tide morning when 150,000 people were digging for what may have been a million clams. They came with their "forks, spears, shovels, and swords," wrote the Five Cities Times Press Recorder.

> [reading] They had volunteer firemen from three cities, and they patrolled, gave first-aid equipment and resuscitators. Forty clammers suffered puncture wounds. Three people drowned. One coronary and uncounted children were lost. The wardens who were checking licenses and limit counts gave up completely. Actually, that was an exceptional day, for the next low tide brought only 60,000 people to the beach.

Isn't that incredible? The otters weren't even there at that point.

The next description I'm going to give you is when there was an otter or two seen. (They couldn't stand to see an otter eating a clam.) On a July 4th weekend later on in another year, the Pismo State Beach staff in their own words said, "...they survived once again four days of mass madness." They list 4,500 motor homes, trailers, and tents which bordered the high tide, 9000 dune buggies, motorcycles, and four-wheel drive vehicles, 163,000 visitors, and 78 automobiles.

After it was all over they had to haul away 13,700 gallons of sewage and 450 cubic yards of trash. Yet in this Five Cities Times Press Recorder they said that, "Sea otters heading for Pismo--could wipe out clam beds." The Department of Fish and Game restricted their management plans. They actually told the people they couldn't dig the clams within a one mile area because they were all gone. People got down with a magnifying glass and they saw tiny tots, those little clams, figured out how many years before they would be large enough to meet the size that they could take.

Then, there was a time when someone looked out and saw an otter or two in that area, and that was in the headlines. I asked at the time that there were all these vehicles and things, "Tell me, do the otters have a chance at any of these clams?" The

warden shook his head and said, "I haven't seen an otter down here all summer."

Lage: Sounds sort of like "the Russians are coming!"

Owings: It was. It was a kind of frenzy that is frightening to find in groups of people.

The people who have the restaurants there can't sell the clams. The people who dig up the clams in theory can't sell them. Although people go down there to have clam chowder in the restaurants, the restaurants have to get their clams somewhere else, which is rather funny.

Lage: I bet a lot of the ones that are dug up aren't eaten.

Owings: Oh yes, I know. We went down there with Bill Mott, who was director of state parks, and he just had a rage. It was after a weekend, and the number of clams that were pulled out and found to be too small because a warden might be someplace or other, and they would be fined--there were all these dead clams all over the place. Then they ran over all these clams, too, in all their dune buggies and things of that sort. It was just turmoil; it was sort of like the Battle of Verdun.

At any rate, the otters began to move further south and they had seasonal fluctuations. These groups were made up mostly of male sea otters. One year they had counted forty-three. Then they returned north again because they had mated with the females who were up near Piedras Blancas. Then another year there were fifty-one, but then they disappeared. Then one time they got up to eighty-three, and then disappeared.

Lage: And those counts were in the Pismo Beach area?

Owings: Yes.

Friends Educational Center, 1978, Finances, and the Otter Raft

Owings: In 1978 we decided that we ought to have a center of some sort. Up to now, all of us who were involved with the otters used our own homes as our work-place.

After Betty Davis's death, Carol Fulton came to work with us. She was just a remarkably productive and exciting person. She took hold. She knew nothing about otters when she arrived, and

she knew more about otters than almost anyone in the world in very short order.

First, she rented a little house in Carmel and started gathering papers. (I dumped some of my papers on her.) It was a very attractive little house, but it filled up quickly. She had to have files, so she filled her closets and little shower with file cases. She couldn't have clothes there because the papers were in her clothes closet.

One time when I stopped in to see her--I saw papers in piles, and she emerged from these piles, and I said to her, "Carol, where did you sleep last night?" She said, "Oh, I slept out in the car." She's a driven person.

Lage: Her background wasn't as a scientist?

Owings: No, no.

She had a very quick mind. She picked up things, and she held them, too, in her mind.

Lage: And something really attracted her to this cause?

Owings: Yes, yes.

She has brought great vitality to Friends of the Sea Otter and played a very important leadership role. [Fulton resigned as executive director in 1989.]

Lage: Then you opened a center?

Owings: Then we opened a center.

I had met a woman named Bobbie Harms up in Sacramento at a mountain lion hearing, and we had had lunch together in the senate building. We began to talk, and I liked her. I found she came from Sonoma where she would testify against the government's predator control program, the killing of the coyotes and all wildlife. She would be one of the few who spoke up. She felt that she had gotten no place.

Lage: Just as an individual?

Owings: Mostly, though she had put together a small committee. I just knew that someday she was going to work with us.

My husband and I went up to the Barnyard [shopping center in Carmel] as they were building it, and there was a little corner,

all rough two-by-fours, white pine, and spaces in between. We both said, "This would be just fine." It was about the size of a closet, a little larger than that. It was small.

Nat and I did everything. We put the wall boards on. We helped get the windows in. We got the light fixtures up. And then we filled it with furniture. My father had died several years before, and I got his old desk and got it treated so that the mahogany top became that nice natural wood. Various and sundry things came from our house.

Then Bobbie Harms came.

Lage: Had she moved down for some other purpose?

Owings: Bobby and Jack Harms owned a house down here and had rented it for a long time but had lived in Berkeley and Sonoma until they were ready to return to this area.

She took over the center and gradually added merchandise to sell--posters, T-shirts, photographs, things like that--to our free educational materials. She hadn't done anything quite like it before. She is a very quiet, thoughtful person, just a splendid person. I'm devoted to her. She worked on that for over eight years.

Then we were told we had to give up the space at the Barnyard. We found another place at the Crossroads, just across the road from the Barnyard, and a tiny bit larger. Jo Nix then took over running the center. Jo had been with us before, but she was married to a man in the armed services in Germany, and the whole family had a session in Germany, she and her children. They were away for several years. Before that, I had had her as my membership secretary. When Jo went to Germany, Tony Wenner took on that job. Tony was superb in what had become an intricate job. The members she dealt with became her friends. She personalized the relationship with the members.

Lage: Now, how about finances? It sounds as if the Friends was getting to be more of an established group with regular expenses.

Owings: Yes, it was. It was my Puritan upbringing or something, but I was always so careful about not spending too much money. Nat and I paid the grants for the scientists at first. We set up a little foundation, which we closed later. So then we [Friends of the Sea Otter] thought we could swing it on our own.

The little shop took in money--. We just have never been ones to do things like what I get in my mail every day, four

inches of slick paper asking for money for very good causes. I never wanted to do that, so we never did.

Lage: As I looked through the Otter Raft, it looked as if you did get a lot of contributions.

Owings: Yes, yes. You can see every time we have new members listed.

Lage: Different levels of benefactors?

Owings: Yes, yes.

Lage: Memorial gifts?

Owings: Yes, and memorial gifts.

Then I thought of the silver circle. The silver circle I decided to define by saying, "We associate the widening circles from an otter's dive with the growing accomplishments of our work and its growing needs..."

Many of the otters' friends had been generous indeed in helping the circles expand, and over the years have repeatedly contributed as patrons, life members, and donors in a sustaining manner. In that silver circle we have almost a group of people who continually give to us.

We have these several bequests, one of which has carried us along for a long time. This was a woman who we didn't know; she had joined us, and once we had had a gift from her, but we just had her down on our list. Out of the blue her lawyer called and said that we were to receive what was to us a very large sum of money. That has been very helpful indeed.

Lage: Has that become an endowment?

Owings: It would be nice if it could. It was in a way for a while, but now we are dipping into it because now we are employing lawyers, and that falls in a further category.

Carol took over the Otter Raft [1979], and did it with a great spirit and often marvelous humor. Her descriptions of some of the antics of the baby otters, one could just read them over and over again.

Lage: That must have been a relief for you also. You had edited Otter Raft for so long.

Owings: Yes, yes.

FRIENDS OF THE SEA OTTER

WHO WE ARE & WHAT WE BELIEVE

WHAT WE DO TO THE OTTER,
WE DO TO A CHAIN OF LIFE.

WHAT WE DO TO THE OTTER,
WE DO TO OURSELVES.

Friends of the Sea Otter brochure
Drawing by Jennifer Owings Dewey

To me, Rachel Carson was one of the greatest human beings that has lived in our time--and you may have noticed this quote on the mirror there-- and for memorial gifts I ran her line, "The flow of time obliterating yet containing all that has gone before... the sea's eternal rhythms, the tides, the beat of surf, the pressing rivers of currents, the stream of life flowing as inexorably as any ocean current from past to unknown future."

Did I mention that many of our drawings were done by my stepdaughter, my husband's daughter, Jennifer? She did that wonderful drawing for the otter petition; she did a very appealing otter resting on its back, laughing. [referring to drawings in the Otter Raft] This is one of Jenny's that I think is nice. [See facing page.]

These were my things. This I did when we were saving the Monastery Beach. That was part of Point Lobos as you drive across there. Eventually we came to this logo which I did. It's on everything. Every year I would think I'm going to change it and make a new one. I just never had time.

Lage: It seems to have caught on. I don't know why it needs to be changed.

Owings: I have feelings about that.

Lage: It has sort of an Eskimo look about it.

Owings: I hadn't thought of that. But it does in a way because there is one Eskimo drawing we had that had an otter and a fish.

Defeat for the Supertanker Terminal at Moss Landing, 1980

Owings: In 1980 we enjoyed a victory. We weren't too accustomed to victories, but this one we really enjoyed. Betty Davis played a large part in it--and Carol Fulton also had come in. This was at the end of Betty's life. She began working on it when she was well, and then as she was failing she still clung to doing what she could.

The U.S. Corps of Engineers denied a permit to the PG&E to expand its oil tanker terminal at Moss Landing. That might not sound like a great deal to anyone, but expanding the terminal would have brought in the supertankers. Many of the supertankers were run by the Liberians. Those were the Liberian boats that

were very ill-kept, and the crews not trained. Liberian tankers were responsible, I think, in the oil spill of the Torrey Canyon. Even now when we have oil tanker spills, almost all are Liberian tankers. At any rate, I got really worked up and excited about it.

I decided to invite the PG&E board of directors, who came from different parts of California, to lunch here. We had Charles Domac, the captain of an oil tanker for many years, and he knew the accidents that could constantly happen. He knew the state of the ships he was given to be captain of, and he knew the hazards of turning one of those tankers into Monterey Bay, knew just where the rocks were, knew everything, knew what the story was. He came with big maps to show that. He called them "harbingers of ecological disaster." He said, "If these large Liberian tankers enter Monterey Bay, we should consider not the possibility, but the inevitability of an oil spill."

Lage: How did you find him?

Owings: He was a resident of Pacific Grove. After he had stopped being a captain, he felt very strongly about oil tankers and the way they were handled. So he was given a job and lived down in San Diego or some place like that and was called in on every oil tanker disaster, to go over it and find out what had caused it. He really knew the story. Here we had these directors of the PG&E. They didn't know anything about anything, that there was even the possibility of any danger, and why we were being so maddening that we should be trying to stop this.

Then there came the happy headline in the Monterey Herald, June 11, 1980: "The U.S. Corps of Engineers denies PG&E permit to expand oil tanker terminal at Moss Landing." The threat to otters was cited. The engineers said, "This oil is the greatest threat to sea otters,and we have made this decision because of the otters." Isn't that wonderful?

The otters were serving people as well, because if there was a disaster it would ruin Point Lobos. It would ruin beaches all up and down the coast for a long ways, plus all the sea birds and the sea lions as well as the otters, and the pleasure yachts, plus the fishing. It would ruin everything.

Lage: The otters were serving a broader purpose.

Did your group go to the Corps of Engineers? Was there a hearing?

Owings: There were hearings. I didn't go. Betty went, to begin with, and then Carol picked it up, and after we won, or was it before, Carol arranged a meeting in Monterey's Colton Hall. She gave it a lot of publicity. We marched along the beaches, the leader blowing bagpipes. We had balloons and we carried flags. It was one of those things that Carol can think up and embroider and just have a lot of fun with.

Lage: I'm curious again about this PG&E meeting. Somehow that tickles me. Did you have trouble getting them all to come down and listen to you?

Owings: Oh no, they didn't all come, of course, but there was a committee of the PG&E. I knew several members of the PG&E board, one fairly well, and the other one I saw very rarely. I asked him if he thought he could arrange a meeting, and he said, "There is a committee on the board which is applying itself to this, and I will see what I can do." So we just had about eight including the vice president.

Lage: And did they respond?

Owings: Yes. First, I had a letter from the vice president that he wrote after he left. We weren't angry at them, and we had these wonderful charts. Everyone gave them otter things. He wrote me a note and said that he had enjoyed it very much indeed, but he couldn't vouch for what was going to come out of it. That sounded fairly negative. But it was the Corps of Engineers that made the decision. That came out very shortly after that.

Translocation of Otters to San Nicholas Island

Owings: It was because of the oil and the threats of the oil to the otters that we began to talk about translocating otters, enough otters to start a breeding colony someplace else in the event that there be a serious spill--and there probably will be a serious spill sometime.

We decided on San Nicholas Island, and I wrote the first article on it. Neither Betty nor Carol were connected at that point.

Lage: That was very early on?

Owings: Yes, yes. I thought that that might be the best place, because it's sixty-four miles out from shore, and there are currents of

water that could divide and carry out if there was an oil spill near the dock or from the drilling platforms that were going to be built down there.

I was criticized for it a great deal by all the fishermen. They like to go out there, although it's very hard for them to get out there because of the rough winds and large waves--lots of wind all the time.

It used to be, interestingly enough, that just thousands of otters were there. Even one Indian woman was left there. It was quite a story. Those of our group who have gone out there have seen the Indian middens and the Indian stone metates and all those things that indicate that Indians lived there for quite a long while. But the otters were all killed for the fur trade. We have records from ship logs. That was about a hundred years ago.

We tried again. We had many reports and studies. The feds were always having studies made about what was the best way to move otters if we were going to translocate them,

Lage: Did this idea come out of the Friends of the Sea Otter, or did it come out of Fish and Wildlife?

Owings: Fish and Wildlife began to talk about having otter zones, which at first we were disturbed about. But after a while we began to realize that we had to compromise in some ways. They studied it and thought, first, way up north near Eureka and near that area would be a good place. Well, people wrote all over their barns, "Keep the goddam otters out," and things of that sort. They were very angry at the prospect of otters coming up there. So, it didn't seem like a very practical place to move otters.

Then we thought of the Channel Islands, and they are all fairly close to the shore. San Miguel has so many sea lions and lots of sea life. I went out on Anacapa, which was interesting in that there they had the pelicans that were having the DDT in their eggs, you know. That was the beginning of their troubles.

Then we decided on San Nicholas Island. Actually, I was talking with Ken Norris one day and he said, "Margaret, why don't you start talking about San Nicholas?" So I looked it up and wrote a little article about it and was very much criticized by the men of Fish and Game for being such a sap as to make a suggestion like that. However, we worked on it, and Carol, as well as Rachel Saunders, our scientific director, have worked on that a great deal. That has meant hearings in Washington, because it was a federal thing as well as state.

We had the abalone people who were against us because the coastal shelf around the island was just covered with abalone and urchins and all kinds of edibles, and precious edibles for the otters. There were large kelp beds, which was good too. So it seemed like the logical place.

Lage: Was the idea controversial within your own group at all?

Owings: Sometimes.

Lage: Like captive breeding for the condors was so controversial.

Owings: Yes. Some people didn't like it at all. We didn't like it terribly. But we saw what we were up against, and we had to make sort of a compromise.

Gill Nets

Owings: There were more and more otters that were being killed. First, we didn't know how or why they were being killed. It turned out that the gill nets were catching them. At any rate, the numbers were diminishing, and for one decade the numbers never increased. Since they should have a percentage of newborn every year, this was a continual cutting down of the number of otters. We weren't gaining anything. Arnett, director of Fish and Game, refused to acknowledge the lethal role of gill nets.

Lage: After Reagan went out, Arnett went with him. Did the Fish and Game become more sympathetic under Jerry Brown?

Owings: Fish and Game were very slow because they had it just deeply into them to look at the otters that way--that Fish and Game should be interested primarily in the resources that can be used by the people.

Lage: Wasn't Charlie Fullerton [director of the Department of Fish and Game] a carry-over from Reagan into the Brown administration? Was he sympathetic?

Dan Miller

Owings: He was middling, though he was so different from Arnett that he was good by comparison. He had a man named Dan Miller under him.

I still have a large pile of Dan Miller's letters. Dan was one who decided to keep, as if he were a public relations man, the otters in the newspapers continually. Daily, we would read about the population explosion of the sea otters, how they will have eaten everything, all sea life along the coastal shores in a short time. He was impossible.

We had a letter from one of our members. This member had written to Dan Miller, and Dan had picked it up and for some reason had decided to answer it. He wrote a long letter that was unbelievable. This woman sent the letter to me. We made duplicate copies of it, and I called Claire Dedrick, who was working up there [as secretary of the Resources Agency] and asked if we could have a meeting with her to discuss Dan Miller. To prove what we had to say, we had this letter written in his own hand.

Lage: How did she respond to it?

Owings: She dismissed Dan then and there. I got a plane and went up. We had a whole bunch of us together. Bill Bryan, who is a defense lawyer, read the letter, and that was enough. I handed it over to him to read aloud, and after he had read it for about five minutes, Charlie Fullerton said, "Now, there is no need to read that." Bill Bryan went on in a steady voice and just kept right on reading up to the last line. By the time he got to the last line Dan Miller was out.

Lage: What had Dan Miller said that was so objectionable?

Owings: Well, it was a series of falsehoods about the otters; their population explosion, which was patently a lie; the amount of abalones they ate, continually exaggerated; the fact that "no otter had died from an oil spill--nor ever would." He was treacherous!

Restraints on Gill Net Fishing

Owings: At one time, years before, during Arnett's period, a fisherman called me who had a broken accent, probably Portuguese. He said, "Lady, you're connected with sea otters?" I said, "Yes." He said, "I want to tell you something. Three of us are here to tell you this, that up in Monterey Bay near Pacific Grove there is a man who comes down and lays his net. He sees where the otters are, and he lays his nets down there around where the otters are already rafting. Then about four in the morning he will pull

those nets in and take the drowned otters out to sea and sink them."

The otters will drown if they are in the nets because they get caught and they can't get out. I reported this to Fish and Game. When Arnett heard about it he was very angry. He left word that anyone receiving any information or suggestions from Margaret Owings should absolutely give her no answer.

I reported it to local Fish and Game. I said, "The fishermen told me"--they knew this man and they didn't like him, I think--"that at four o'clock or four-thirty, this man will begin to pull his nets in. If you get out there, you will see what we are talking about." Arnett heard about it and said, "Pay no heed to that. I don't want anyone out there," and so forth. So for many years we lost otters without knowing why we were losing them, until the use of gill nets became more clearly apparent.

Carol could go into much more detail than I because that was her special thing that she worked very hard on, and did very well with.

Lage: Were there particular groups of fishermen using the gill net? I had understood from reading about it that it wasn't an aggressive act towards the otter, but a way of fishing.

Owings: They were fishing for halibut.

Unfortunately, it turned out that most of the gill nets that were catching the otters were a different kind of net that the Vietnamese fishermen were using. I think they had a lot of nylon, and they also had a certain size to the holes and were very long. Some, several miles long. And they would sink down. We have some drawings of how it worked.

Lage: And it was a legal means of fishing at the time?

Owings: Yes, but it was different. They brought this new thing in. Because they were the boat people, and because of all the sad things that were such tragedies that had occurred, we were sorry that they were Vietnamese. We didn't want it to seem as if we were making them the scapegoat of the problem. But it turned out that it was so. It came out in some newspaper articles. After that, we didn't speak about it again. We just spoke about it as gill nets or trammel nets. We didn't go into it.

Lage: You tried to avoid discussing what groups used the nets.

Owings: We tried to avoid it, but it went to some court. Apparently, a Vietnamese woman was especially the strongest one in that company. She had been through so much that she could stand to battle everything. In the end we heard less of it.

Carol Fulton got a bill passed by the legislature. It was sponsored by Senator Henry Mello and Assemblyman Sam Farr, Fred Farr's son. The two of them did a remarkable job of passing this, and Carol was up there running around seeing everyone.

They decided that no one could set a net that was shallower than fifteen fathoms. We felt good about it; we felt great rejoicing when we reached this decision, and it had passed. Then it was discovered that many of the otters were rafting exactly on the fifteen-fathom line [laughter], especially around the Holiday Inn up there on Monterey Bay. It also was happening down near Morro Bay, where we had over ten dead otters washed ashore at one time.

There were different kinds of people involved in the netting. Some would try to hide it. Some would report it as an error. They were reprimanded, but we didn't take it to court or anything. Others were the kind who would have sacks ready and stones in the sacks and drop the drowned otters overboard out further. So we had different kinds of people that we were dealing with.

It was really embarrassing, and embarrassing also to Mello and Sam Farr, to have to go back to the legislators and say, "No, we need to extend the limit to nineteen fathoms to get them in a safer zone." But they got it changed.

Also, we had a new director of Fish and Game, Jack Parnell. There were some areas where they couldn't ask for the nets to be put down, because there weren't otters there. But if they came, which did happen, they had a clause in the bill that the director could ask for an immediate stoppage of the gill-net fishing.

Lage: So you were dependent there on a good director?

Owings: Parnell responded. An Arnett kind of person wouldn't have at all.

Enforcement and Education

Lage: I should think that the strength of this legislation is all in the enforcement. If they look the other way--.

Owings: Yes, this was our problem. We haven't enough people to enforce the legislation.

Lage: You mean enough people employed by the state?

Owings: Yes. The Feds haven't enough people either. The Feds have especially nice people. They are especially good people. They, I think, changed the minds of these young men who worked under Dan Miller and looked at things only from his point of view, which they did for quite a while. Now working with the fine young men down at Piedras Blancas is a different story.

Lage: I wonder if some of it is how the young wildlife people are educated, that there is a broader kind of education.

Owings: Well, that is another thing that is an aside. When we were on Defenders of Wildlife we were given $3 million. Then immediately the board, who used to get along very well with one another, began to fight.

Lage: It had to do with the money?

Owings: Ian McMillan wanted to have a university course and a whole section given not to the kind of management they advocate up at Davis or down at San Luis Obispo, but one that had a different point of view and respect for the wildlife. That reminded me of that because that training is, of course, a very big thing. But Ian didn't win. (I got some of the money, though, for the Koford study of the lion.)

Lage: Is there more on the oil drilling issue? I think as I looked over the Otter Raft there seem to be an awful lot of politics there--Washington, California, Deukmejian?

Owings: Just nothing but. Carol was very much involved with that. I went to some of the meetings, too, but I left it with Carol, and Rachel.

Lage: Do you work with the other groups interested in the oil drilling?

Owings: Well, NRDC [Natural Resources Defense Council] has been very strong and helpful, and the Sierra Club to an extent. Then there is GOO [Get Oil Out] down in Santa Barbara, if you remember them.

Lage: Are they still active?

Owings: No, but I talk with them every once in a while when we really get frantic up here.

During the presidential campaign Dukakis made the statement that he wouldn't have oil drilling along the coast, including from Big Sur up to the Oregon border. And Deukmejian didn't want drilling, but he can be influenced.

Lage: And then the Bush campaign--wasn't there a moratorium on oil drilling during the 1988 election campaign?

Owings: Yes, yes. But it's going to be brought up again. None of these things can be settled easily or quickly. It's something that goes on and on and on. The task must go on.

Lage: That's a very different perspective from what you described earlier today when in 1968 you told Nat it would take two or three years, you thought, to save the otters.

Owings: I know it, I know it. It's not only a lifetime, but it will be many lifetimes.

Resource Secretaries Livermore, Dedrick, and Johnson

Lage: I want to ask you about Ike Livermore and have you contrast him with Claire Dedrick as secretary for the Resources Agency.

Owings: I talked about Ike earlier when I was discussing the problems we had with the redwoods. I fought him on that--I was on the Park Commission at the time. He was adamant.

I knew Ike. He roomed with my brother at the Harvard Business School. They both had been at Stanford. They both liked to fish and they both loved the Sierras and so forth. So they had a lot in common. They sort of looked alike, too.

When the two of them came back from Harvard to Berkeley we had a party. We had an outdoor fireplace in the garden below the house. There I met Ike for the first time. Then I corresponded with him because he left his tuxedo someplace, and I had to pick it up and send it to him. Therefore, there was an exchange of notes. I liked him, and I like his family.

How I brought up the subject of mountain lions way back then, I don't know. He was adamant about the shooting of the lion. This was just <u>years</u> ago, 1934!

Lage: I wouldn't expect you would have been thinking about mountain lions then.

Owings: I was. I have been thinking about the mountain lions all my life. [laughter] I think I almost have to omit speaking of Ike in this, although as secretary of resources he did a good job. He was always very sympathetic to the otter problems, always.

Lage: He was also on the Fish and Game Commission.

Owings: Yes.

Lage: Just to make this clear, Ike Livermore was secretary of the Resources Agency under Reagan. Then we had Governor Jerry Brown, and Claire Dedrick came in. Was the Brown-Dedrick administration more sympathetic or accessible? Of course, Ike must have been very accessible since you knew him.

Owings: Yes, he was.

Lage: Was there a change when Claire Dedrick came in?

Owings: We were disappointed with Claire on the sea otter and on the oil. We couldn't arrive at any real understanding, although she came to some of our sea otter meetings. She made an effort, but she remained adamant that the sea otters shouldn't go south of Point Conception, ever.

Lage: Do you think she was responding to her own department, the Fish and Game Department, probably?

Owings: No, because she was higher up than that.

Lage: I was just wondering if she was taking their advice.

Owings: Whatever it was, it was a disappointment.

Lage: Was Huey Johnson any more receptive?

Owings: Huey is so funny. I had taken Betty Davis to see him in his office in Sacramento--.

When I retired from the board of the Environmental Defense Fund they gave me a big dinner. Ike was one who spoke, and immediately he began to tell a redwoods story. Huey spoke, and he said he had never understood about Margaret Owings. All he knew was that one time he had an appointment with Margaret Owings, and therefore he had to get his place all cleaned up. That made him sort of cross. "Everything was to be in order when Margaret came."

Betty and I were ushered into his office. It was the same office for resources secretaries with whom we had attended meetings in the past, but things were different! A woven string hammock was central in the room. You entered the door, and there was the hammock, so that one could swing back and forth during an interview. Behind it, on the wall, was a large painting with lots of yellow surrounding a woman. Somehow, neither Betty nor I felt we could sit in the hammock under the circumstances.

Lage: This is where you were supposed to sit, this hammock?

Owings: Yes. Finally Betty sat in it, and I sat over there and was looking at the big painting. We had come up well prepared with what we were going to ask and what we were going to say. It wasn't that we just went up there with empty mouths. But Huey was a hard person to reach, and we accomplished next to nothing.

Have you interviewed him?

Lage: No, I haven't. You say it's hard to get him to focus in on what you have come to talk about?

Owings: Yes, to take hold of a thing and be able to deal with it. It was a strange meeting.

Lage: Offices tell you a lot about people.

XI PRESERVATION OF THE MOUNTAIN LION, 1962 TO THE PRESENT

[Interview 7: October 8, 1987]

Seeds of Change, The Troubled Heart

Lage: We're going to talk about the mountain lion battles, twenty-five years of them. I believe you wanted to start with something that was particularly meaningful.

Owings: Yes, a line that I found some years ago, written by Laurens van der Post, and it says everything, as far as I was concerned, of these efforts that I have made. I used this line when the National Audubon Society gave me a citation for the work that I had done for the removal of the bounty on the mountain lion. That was the occasion when Rachel Carson was there to receive the National Audubon Award, and she asked me afterwards to tell her again that line and who wrote it.

> [reading] Great things begin in the tiny seed of the small change in the troubled, individual heart. One single, lonely, inexperienced heart has to change first, and all the rest will follow.

Well, I suppose in relation to the lion, although that line refers to other things that I have done in my adult life, it began with an incident that troubled me deeply. We had a lion around our place. We had heard it in the canyon below, we'd heard strange, almost like whistling, sounds. We did not have the road to Grimes Point, down to our house, paved. It was just a dust road. Therefore there were very clear marks of the paws of a lion. And it pleased me a great deal and it pleased my husband, too.

When I was younger I had heard the sound of the mountain lion screaming; that was a vivid memory from childhood. And here one time we heard one to the south, and it came very close to the house. But that kind of whistling sound, I talked to Maurice

Hornocker about it, and he imitated the sound. It's the conversational kind of sound between lions, one lion with another. It is not a sound that a solitary lion makes. One time it happened when I was out there with my Pekinese, little Muffet, and her hair stood right up. She knew it was something very special that she should be afraid of.

Well, then suddenly we read in the newspaper [1962] that a young man had shot that lion, and not only shot the lion but was awarded, as a great hero, a bounty from the state and from the county. It was a female lion.

Lage: The paper told where it was shot?

Owings: Yes, it was right up here. And I was just sick to hear it, and I knew then it was going to make a change in the pattern of my life, because I was going to do something about it. When I heard about the bounty, read about it in the newspaper, I decided that was the first thing I was going to do--get rid of that bounty.

Lage: You had already had some experience because you had fought the sea lion battle by that time?

Owings: Yes, but not in the same way.

Lage: Right, but at least you had that background.

Owings: I had that background, but not up in Sacramento, because for the sea lion campaign I had hired a man to help me lobby. I did everything from my dining room table for the sea lions, or I went to editors and to the newspapers.

I knew Fred Farr and I went to him--I met him at an evening event--and asked him if he would introduce a bill to remove the bounty on the mountain lion. He, I think, was a little surprised perhaps at first, but he seemed to adjust to it. He said, "I think we can work that out," and that pleased me immensely. He discussed it with the Department of Fish and Game. They weren't too enthusiastic about it, but we had a director at that time named Walter Shannon, and Shannon personally felt that bounties were a useless and foolish way of curtailing predators--although others in his department didn't go along with him.

Actually, at that point I knew very little about the mountain lion, from a scientific point of view. I knew it as just an average person who hears of the lion and perhaps carries a little uneasiness about it--as I did as a young child when I heard that scream in the night.

I also was uneasy about how to handle the legislators, although I had Fred Farr there, who is a gentle-spoken, fine man. But he is not a fighter. (He might disagree, but I think that I am correct in saying it that way.) So, I decided that the first thing I had to do was to have other people who would be interested in the same thing and to have it on a piece of stationery that I would have, and I developed a committee.

Forming the Committee to Remove the Bounty

Lage: And did you have a name for your committee?

Owings: I think it was just "Committee to Repeal the State Bounty on the California Mountain Lion."

Because I had taken a great deal of pleasure in reading nature writers, I wrote to Olaus Murie right away, and he was behind me a hundred percent. So I had him, and Fairfield Osborn from the New York Zoological Society, and of course my old friend Ansel Adams, and Laurance Rockefeller, whom I had done a good many things with--I knew that he would go along. And Joseph Wood Krutch, and Nicholas Roosevelt.

Nicholas Roosevelt actually went to the Grand Canyon with his uncle, Theodore Roosevelt, when T.R. got the brilliant thought that there were too many lions around the Grand Canyon, so that they were going to go in and kill them. Nick was a young boy at the time, and they were shooting right and left, with dogs. T.R. Roosevelt was just zero on the facts because he had said that there were no more deer, that they had all been eaten by the lions. So they killed all the lions, and in a very brief number of years there were so many deer that they ate all the browse and became ill or starved. As you know, the lions cull out the poor specimens, the weak specimens, and the ill specimens of deer, so that it was a very interesting demonstration of that.

Lage: Had Nicholas Roosevelt followed through on the consequences of the lion kill?

Owings: Yes, he knew about the consequences.

Lage: He lives here near you?

Owings: He lived close to us on Partington Ridge. But he died several years ago. I can't include him in our present work.

Then I had Newton Drury, David Brower, Carl Buchheister of the Audubon Society, Rachel Carson, and Dr. Robert Miller. Anyway, those were more or less the names that I gathered together.

Lage: Did you know Rachel Carson at the time?

Owings: No.

Lage: This was your first contact?

Owings: I knew her after this; I knew her because of this.

Lage: Was there a difficulty in getting her to join?

Owings: No, she just took a little longer time to respond. [laughter] What she said was so meaningful and pure in the way that she always was. Her writing always was beautiful. I'd always felt it was sort of a poetic way of winning over the public.

And at that time Sigurd Olson came here from Minnesota for a visit, and we walked up along the top of the ridge and saw the tracks of a lion. I was talking to him about lions. Sigurd is a man who spent much of his adult life in a canoe in the wilderness areas, sort of as a voyageur. I talked earlier about him.

The day he had to leave after his visit here--he left in the late afternoon--we came down from the top of the mountains, and I said to him, "Please, Sig,"--because he talked so beautifully and thrillingly about being so pleased that we had this symbol of wilderness still there--"won't you write it down for me?" He went downstairs, and he spent about ten minutes at it. He gave me the papers as he left. He used phrases that I continued to use for some time, quoting him, because they were so meaningful.

About the bounty--over fifty-six years they had paid out some $27,500 in bounty to men who shot and brought in the heads of the lions.

Again, an earlier association I had with lions and bounty killers, when I was a child, and we were camping at Wawona, my father heard about "Bruce, the Professional Lion Hunter." He took all of us to see Bruce [Jay Bruce]. I was very young then, but it left an undying impression upon me because he loved to tell lurid tales, and he told us some, and afterwards I looked fearfully around at the great rocks as we walked around.

In one story he had found himself on a shelf of rock, with no ammunition in his gun. He had climbed up on the rock and there he

was facing this lion and he couldn't get back. He had a little dog that was there, that I saw at the time, like a little fox terrier, and so he tied his handkerchief around the little dog's neck and sent it home. [laughter] His wife, seeing this little dog, thought something was wrong, and so she put two bullets in the handkerchief. The little dog returned, and "Bruce" shot the poor lion. I felt sorry for the lion, believe me.

Anyway, that's neither here nor there, just incidents. During those years, for example in Humboldt County, for a number of years they averaged twenty-two lions a year. At this time of 1962 they had only two or three lions left. They had really almost cleared the lions from counties such as Humboldt, Trinity, and Shasta. They are building up again, but we never have to worry about being overpopulated by lions.

Lage: Maybe by deer, but not by lions.

Owings: For example, during the year 1962 the state had paid for 114 slain lions that year. That was $5,230. As some people would say to me, "Oh, isn't it terrible to use the money for that!" I agree it's terrible to use the money, but that was hardly the reason that I was fighting my battle. It was losing the lions that was terrible.

Lage: The money must have come from hunting licenses or something, wouldn't it have? I don't imagine that it came out of the general fund.

Owings: Something like that.

Battling Against the Bounty in Sacramento, 1962-1963

Lage: So you had Fred Farr introduce the bill?

Owings: Yes. On the Fish and Game Committee of the Assembly there was a woman named Pauline Davis who was chairman. She had taken the place of her husband, who had been on that committee. When he died she followed in his footsteps, and followed a feeling that he had always expressed, which I'm sympathetic with except that it causes a pronounced imbalance in wildlife. He loved the deer and didn't want the deer shot, and so she was totally opposed to the removal of the bounty. She felt that the lion should be shot. They should really get rid of the lion so that the deer wouldn't be troubled by the lions.

I was at a loss to know how to handle her. Then someone told me that she admired Rachel Carson very much, and since I admired Rachel Carson to an immense degree myself, I wrote to Rachel Carson and asked her, and she sent a little note. I took that note, and when they were voting in the House, I had a man take it down to Pauline Davis, and she read it. It made the difference in her vote. She changed her vote--and she spoke to me about it afterwards.

Lage: Had you tried to talk to her face to face before that? And that hadn't worked?

Owings: Yes, that hadn't worked at all. I was at a loss. With these committees, you begin to sum up who is going to vote rather early. Some people always vote on the opposite side from the one you are working on, as I was to find out as the years passed in all the hearings that I went to on lions.

Lage: Did you have a sense that all these hearings made a difference? I have heard people say that their minds are made up before the hearings. Did you have that sense, or did you think that they listened to what you said?

Owings: For one thing, I learned that one doesn't just go and meet them for the first time at the hearings. You go and see them. You talk with them. You take them photographs, wonderful photographs.

There weren't many photographs of the lions in the beginning. Maurice Hornocker had taken wonderful photographs up in Idaho and we got some of those. They weren't the California lions, but nevertheless--. I used things of that nature, and wrote a great deal, and then got editorials and photographs in the papers. I worked a lot on that kind of thing.

But there were some men who throughout all of the hearings on the lions, were still on that committee and still voted no. They just wouldn't move an inch.

Lage: Then you had some that must have been <u>for</u> you all the way along?

Owings: Yes, John Nejedly was great, and Peter Behr. And there were others.

Lage: Then you had the swing votes, I assume, that you targeted?

Owings: The first hearing bill that came up, after the bounty had been removed, was introduced by Fred Marler. I was horrified to see that they were just going to go out and kill the lions. They would have a permit for two dollars, and you could shoot them day

and night. All you were supposed to do was to report to Fish and Game. That's all they required.

Lage: They removed the bounty, but you could still hunt them?

Owings: Yes. I hadn't grasped it. You couldn't conceive of how naive I was about these things. The Marler bill failed, though, because of little things that were in it that the legislators didn't approve of.

Then Alan Pattee made the suggestion that if they were going to hunt lions, let them hunt without dogs, and that failed. We tried that same bill again, this past year [1987]. Of course, it got no place. We tried everything possible.

As I am speaking to you now, the mountain lion hunting season was to begin on the tenth of October, in other words the day after tomorrow. Because we took it to court, we got it at least put off until the fifteenth of November, and now we are taking it to the appellate court. These struggles just go on for an awfully long time.

Lion Studies--Combining Scientific Facts with Emotional Appeal

Owings: Fish and Game had no idea how many lions there were. One of the men, Wallace MacGregor, who was game management supervisor, made the statement rather cheerfully that, "As long as we keep on killing them, we know we have lions." That antagonized me a great deal, needless to say.

That's when I went to Starker Leopold, and he proposed that I get hold of Dr. Carl Koford who had recently done a mountain lion study in Baja California, and also a study for several years on the jaguar in South America. Carl Koford is a very soft-spoken man, and I always thought of him doing everything as if he were doing it in moccasin feet, because he moved so softly about, and his statements were soft and carefully thought out, never dramatizing, simply stating things.

At that time when I was on the board of directors of Defenders of Wildlife, the Defenders of Wildlife, Audubon, and the S.P.C.A. or Humane Society were given some forty million dollars. [See p. 161.] I worked very hard to get the board of Defenders of Wildlife to agree to have a study made and to finance it with some of the money that we received--of course it was over a period of

years that we received that money. And then I got some of it from Audubon. So I was able to raise the money for Koford's study.

We engaged Carl Koford for three years. He wanted to work longer, and so he continued to work on his own, because he wanted to complete the study. (So often, when stopped too soon, studies are left unfinished in the mind.)

The number of lions in the state, one might almost say, is not as important as watching the decline of their habitat. The freeways, the off-road vehicles and all the mountain roads that were being built, allowed people to get into lion country very easily. With a pack of dogs, the lion had very little chance of escaping.

The other thing was that it isn't as if all the lions were alike. A resident female, which we had up here and understood, would raise young about every two years--usually just one, once in a while, two. That's the central focus, and the males are out fighting one another. They are resident too, but as soon as that young lion became old enough to be on its own, it would leave and have to find its own territory. There were things of this sort we began to learn through the Koford study.

Lage: He looked into habitat destruction too?

Owings: Yes, but not as broadly as, for example, Maurice Hornocker will do if he carries out his study, as he did in Idaho. Koford didn't have enough time, and he didn't have helpers and so forth.

There was another study Fish and Game carried on. A young man who had never had any connection with lions started it, a very pleasant young man. He spent a number of months just going about the state talking with people. He talked with ranchers, with houndsmen, with hunters, with the California Federation of Wildlife, and with conservationists. He came here, and that's when I met him. His name is Larry Sitton. I felt he was sympathetic to the lion in a way; I felt a good exchange with him. But I was horrified with the list of people he was conferring with to determine the number of lions.

The numbers these people were estimating were swelling up because they realized that they didn't want the lion taken off the hunting list; they wanted to keep it on for the pleasure of hunting. Aside from me, there were just two or three names that I would call conservationists.

Ray Arnett had become our director of Fish and Game at that point, which was a tragic period for Fish and Game. That was

under Reagan [starting in 1967]. He had worked for Richfield Oil and he was the man who brought the money to Reagan from Richfield Oil, and Reagan asked him what he wanted. He said he would like to be head of Fish and Game. He was head of a sports club some place in California, and quite a hunter. He had no respect for wildlife whatsoever.

Lage: So from the Brown administration to the Reagan administration it sounds as if you saw a distinct change. You had said Shannon had been sympathetic. Did that make your efforts a lot more difficult?

Owings: It certainly did.

Arnett had a deputy by the name of Charlie Fullerton. Charlie wanted to be fair, and he wanted one thing that many conservationists had asked for, and that is, to begin with, changing the name of the Department of Fish and Game to the Department of Fish and Wildlife, because the terminology of "game" means it's a resource you hunt. But he had Arnett leaning over his shoulder all the time.

Lage: He was a civil servant, wasn't he, not a political appointment?

Owings: Not a political appointment, no.

We were having a big period of freeway construction, and those with fences along the side were completely changing the life of the transient lions who, once they leave their mothers, start out on their own and find signs of other male lions and have to seek further and further. That's one reason why they would find a lost lion every once in a while in some strange places, such as in Pacific Grove. Also, they couldn't get through the fences or cross the freeways very easily. I had a photograph of one who was crossing the freeway, and it was hit. Only a year ago we had one killed on the freeway coming up from Monterey to Carmel. I always feel sad when that happens.

Lage: I want you to make a point that you made when we were talking earlier, that I think fits in here, about having your emotional tie but realizing you wouldn't be listened to just on the basis of emotion.

Owings: Being a woman, and being a non-hunter, and being disturbed even as a child when the little boys were shooting birds with BB guns, I carried that with me. But I knew when I started with the legislature or started anything of this nature that I had to do it differently. I had to have people working from the man's point of view. And for that reason we had a rancher who appeared at

hearings, Ian McMillan, and for an advisor we had the former deputy director, Robert Jones, who was let go when Ray Arnett came into power. And I had a man named Stokes who hunted lions with "Bruce, the Professional Lion Hunter," which surprised everyone. I felt it was very important.

Memorable Legislative Hearings, and Memorable Aerial Arrival

Lage: You were going to tell about the number of hearings and a few of the incidents that you remember particularly?

Owings: Over the years, and it has been a period in which I can use that term, "over the years," we had a series of moratoriums. Each time they would decide, all right, we will continue with no hunting for another four years, or another three years. Towards the end, the moratoriums got shorter and shorter, and it became two years at the close when we finally lost. One can speak of them in terms of numbers, but one can also remember them in terms of incidents.

At one time I was going to pick up Starker Leopold for a hearing in Sacramento, and I chartered a plane. I had never met the pilot before, nor known that plane, and it alarmed me a little because there was a storm coming in. I soon found that the young man knew very little about flying. We started over towards the Santa Cruz mountains, and then it just rolled in, so then he came down to the water, and we were going over the water at about, probably, twenty feet. It seemed as if we were just skimming the waves, because that's all we could see. We went up the coast and then turned and went into the San Francisco Bay.

Lage: You were the only passenger at that point?

Owings: Yes, I was alone.

Suddenly I looked up and saw the Bay Bridge. We were just going under the Bay Bridge! [laughter] I said to him, "Are you sure you are allowed to go under the Bay Bridge?" He said, "Oh, I didn't see it!" [laughter] We somehow didn't hit any of the great structures of the bridge. We circled around, and it was just terrifically rough, and we gained altitude, so that we were able to swing up and over the bridge.

By the time we got to the Oakland airport, where I was picking up Starker and another scientist, the rain was so heavy that you couldn't see through the windshield or anything. The pilot got word that the Oakland airport was now closed. I said,

"Well, just land." [laughter] So we landed, and out came Starker. The other scientist, who was waiting in another building, thinking that Starker wasn't there, we finally fished out.

Then the pilot, who didn't know how to run certain instruments, got another man on board--if you can conceive of this!

Lage: To show him how to do it?

Owings: Yes! Oh God!

We had a very rough trip up to Sacramento, but by the time we got to Sacramento we had escaped from the great pressure of the storm. It was just a regular storm then. We piled out of the plane and grabbed a taxi, rushed to the capitol, as fast as we could go, because it was already past the time the hearing was going to begin. I was having a fit.

As we entered the capitol, headed for the room, the two men, terrified at what I had put them through, said, "Just a moment." They each had to rush to the men's room. I wouldn't do that. I walked rapidly along and came into an empty room, followed very shortly by Starker and the other scientist. I think there was one man, and he opened the door from the side to tell me that the hearing had been canceled.

Lage: So, all for naught.

Owings: Yes, and it was a very dangerous thing that we did. Some incidents ran more smoothly, I might add.

I did an enormous amount of driving, at that point, back and forth to Sacramento. But when we were hurrying to some hearings and we needed to pick up a rancher, and pick up people in different places, then I chartered a plane. It was nearly always, I might add, a single engine, single propeller plane. And I don't like to go in single propeller planes!

At any rate, we picked them up. One time we had about six people we picked up, and we were there in time. We were given a room to review our presentation so that we wouldn't be repeating ourselves, and oh, I thought that was just great. These men were all busy men, and they had given their time to come. It was just wonderful. Whereupon a senator came into the room to tell us that they had canceled it. It wouldn't be until the following week.

Lage: Was this a deliberate ploy?

Owings: It was with [Senator H.L.] Richardson. I don't know who had canceled that. I was learning all the time.

Lage: You mentioned another time when Richardson did seem to make kind of a deliberate--.

Owings: Oh, impossible! Just impossible!

After Carl Koford had worked for us doing this study for three years, he wanted more time. Most scientists want to go back over and learn, again and again, by studying year after year. I know Durwood Allen always talked about that on the Isle Royale study of the wolves and the moose. Statements he was about to make two years before, two years later he found that he had missed a whole point of the relationship and the balance or imbalance, depending on weather and all kinds of things.

In this incident, we went up to Sacramento on a bill that had been introduced by Richardson himself. Richardson was a man who tended to be in favor of everything I was against, and against everything I was in favor of. He was backed by the NRA [National Rifle Association] and was their representative in the Senate.

Lage: His association with the NRA was no secret?

Owings: No, no.

We got there at eight o'clock. It was quite hard to get there at eight. I drove up and I remember leaving here at four o'clock in the morning, or something. Carl Koford had driven from Berkeley. We had all driven from different places. There were about four, five, or six of us who were going to speak, and then there were others who came from some distance to be in the audience, and to be there, if necessary.

We had planned our approach, how we were going to handle it. This was really going to be Carl Koford's first opportunity to present what he had found, in very brief words. This is no joke, because a scientist wants to go into all the background and detail. We kept saying, "You understand you have just got to keep it down because you won't hold their interest, and you'll be dismissed before you have gotten to the point." We made him, I think, a little nervous about that.

Richardson went on with the hearing until nine o'clock at night. He saw us sitting there. Many of the audience had left by that time. He called his own men in, including a dentist by the name of Washburn, who was a houndsman. He called houndsmen and

the avid hunters in to speak, men who gave such preposterous numbers and made such preposterous statements that Koford, who is honesty personified, could hardly believe that anyone could stand up and say these things. He turned to me and sort of softly said, "As soon as I get up there I'm going to just have to correct all those things."

At nine o'clock Richardson announced that he had had his men speak, and that he was ending the meeting and could no longer carry it on. He would carry it on later, but he only had to let them know the day before, I think, or it could be the evening before. He made it just as hard as possible for someone coming from afar, as we had.

In the end, though, I think we frightened him. He had had so much mail. I had worked awfully hard on that, getting the mail to the committee.

Lage: Could you submit a written statement, then?

Owings: Yes, we also submitted written statements for each one, and we had spoken statements.

Lage: So, someone like Richardson is hard to deal with, I would think. You have no recourse when he organizes things that way?

Owings: No, and it's a sad commentary, very sad commentary, to have someone in the legislature with that much--.

Well, that was that. Of course, we had just a series of incidents that occurred. I was always on tenterhooks about the whole thing.

Lage: So you were successful in getting moratoriums passed every few years? [See following page for mailing to urge moratorium.]

Owings: Yes. We had an assemblyman named [John] Dunlap pass three different bills in '71, '74, '76, and '77. He led and was very faithful to us and helpful.

Lage: Do you remember how he became interested in the mountain lions?

Owings: I don't know. It was through one of Dunlap's legislative assistants. We used these assistants quite a bit. They were very helpful, and caught Dunlap's interest. I would say that he was not a man who would be a naturalist or necessarily a lion man in any way, but he accepted the job and saw it through.

After Dunlap, then we had [State Senator Robert] Presley. That was the time that we almost failed. That was a time when a man by the name of Kutilek, a scientist at San Jose State--we had been meeting with him for a year or two, and he had graduate students working under him--got up to speak, again a soft-spoken man who wouldn't hurl himself into a thing with either drama or excitement. He would state the facts, but he wanted to state the facts.

We all told him that he had to shorten what he was going to say, but he was a scientist, and he had to say it. So he got up, and after he had spoken for possibly three minutes--and this is for a three-year study--he was called off by the chairman of that committee. It offended him no end, of course. That's why some of the scientists don't like to become involved.

Lage: Of course the legislators might use the study itself.

Owings: That's right....I'm hopeful, and Kutilek now is doing a study on mountain lions on David Packard's ranch at Mount Hamilton. He has been working on that for quite a period of time.

I have forgotten the number that David Packard mentioned the other day that there are on that property. He likes it very much, having mountain lions. He was very helpful to us in writing a letter that we could send to ranchers. Mr. Packard has big ranches, a number of the San Felipe ranches around the state. This one that is adjacent to our property here is a very small ranch. It is a place to live. As he even said, "I don't know why I run cattle here, because I would like to have the grass and the wildflowers grow, and leave all the wildlife alone."

At any rate, he was very helpful about that.

The reason that we finally failed in 1986 was because of Governor Deukmejian and Senator Richardson. They did a series of things. Richardson came to Presley and said, "The governor will veto this bill unless you remove any sound of any word that sounds like protection of the mountain lion." Next, he had to remove any word that sounded like moratorium.

Bit by bit, at first, Presley became quite incensed, and he continued to be incensed. Richardson and Deukmejian were just asking for everything. But in the end we thought we might be able to get a study out of it. We put our heads together and said, "All right, we'll go along with the last one, but we are ashamed of it. We don't like to have our names attached to it." The legislature passed these all along the line, but they would have gone with us. Then when it reached Deukmejian's desk he vetoed it

IF THE CALIFORNIA MOUNTAIN LION WILL CONTINUE – AS A PART OF OUR HERITAGE
The State Senators who will hear, pass or defeat the Mountain Lion Bill
MUST FIRST HEAR FROM ALL OF US IMMEDIATELY!
Address: State Capitol, Sacramento, 95814

Senate Natural Resources Committee
John Nejedly (Chairman) – Contra Costa
Robert Lagomarsino (Vice Ch.) – Santa Barbara
Dennis Carpenter – Orange
Gordon Cologne – Riverside
Ralph Dills – Los Angeles
Arlen Gregorio – San Mateo
H[illegible] Richardson – Los Angeles
Albert Rodda – Sacramento
James Wentworth – Los Angeles

PASSED

WRITE NOW →

Senate Finance Committee
Randolph Collier (Chairman) – Sacramento
Stephen Teale (Vice Ch.) – Sacramento
Anthony Beilenson – Beverly Hills
Clair Burgener – San Diego
Lou Cusanovich – Los Angeles
Donald Grunsky – Monterey
John Holmdale – Alameda
Robert Lagomarsino – Santa Barbara
Fred Marler, Jr. – Redding
Albert Rodda – Sacramento
Alan Short – Stockton
Walter Stiern – Bakersfield
Howard Way – Exeter

PRESERVE
THE MOUNTAIN LION
BIG SUR, CALIFORNIA 93920
Raymond Dubois

6 CENT
STAMP
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(My mailing for the Moratorium
under Assemblyman Dunlap)

Lion head drawn by myself)

ACTION TO PRESERVE THE CALIFORNIA MOUNTAIN LION

It is time that further hunting of this proud and beautiful animal comes to a halt. We must guard his presence while there are still enough to survive.

ASSEMBLY BILL 660 (Dunlap) PROPOSES TO STOP SPORT KILLING OF MOUNTAIN LIONS BUT PROVIDES FOR THE TAKE OR CAPTURE OF LIONS CAUSING DEPREDATION.
Bill passed Assembly – now coming before Senate Committee Natural Resources

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1.) **HOW MANY MOUNTAIN LIONS IN CALIFORNIA?**
No one knows. No intensive studies have established the lion population although Fish & Game has used an estimated number of 600 for 45 years.

2.) **NUMBER OF MOUNTAIN LIONS DECLINING.**
Although Fish & Game states "lion population has remained stable" – available evidence shows a significant drop of lions killed (53%) since the peak decade of reported kills and bounty payments (1927-1936) to the last decade.

3.) **WHY ARE LION NUMBERS DECLINING?**
Hunting appears to be the most important reason behind the decline of lion populations. Skilled hunters and trained dogs are able to drastically reduce or eliminate descrete lion populations. Reproductive rate of lions is low and recovery of populations is slow..The great number of back country roads now makes most lion populations accessible to the hunter. These lion populations may be reduced before an influx of transient lions from adjacent areas can contribute to further propogation.

4.) **LION PREY**
Although deer are the major prey of mountain lions in California, this predation is not destructive to deer populations but developes alertness and fleetness in the herds which move about more within their range. Deer are primarily controlled by the quality of vegetation within their range.

5.) **MOUNTAIN LIONS AND DOMESTIC STOCK**
Lions kill some domestic livestock but it is not considered a major problem. U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service indicates 6 lions killed by them in the past 4 years in response to complaints. Although a California law passed in 1969 requires written report to Fish & Game when any lions are killed due to predation of livestock, no reports have been received in the past 1½ years.

6.) **FISH & GAME'S POSITION –**
The Department is recommending continued sport hunting of the mountain lion – to the Fish & Game Commission. (Some 3000 lion tags sold thus far, to prospective lion hunters.) Although they propose some new regulations, it is common knowledge that the rarer the lion becomes, the greater the effort to hunt him out as trophy.
For this reason, it rests with the legislature to take this action to halt hunting the mountain lion. Assembly Bill 660 will do it.

IN AN AGE WHEN WE ARE LOOSING SO MUCH BEAUTY AND BALANCE IN OUR ENVIRONMENT, ONCE THE LION IS GONE, A UNIQUE SAVOR HAS GONE OUT OF WILDNESS – AN APEX OF WILDLIFE BELONGING TO ALL THE PEOPLE.

WRITE IMMEDIATELY TO MEMBERS OF
SEN MITTEE
SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE
HEARING - MAY 17

anyway, which passed the trophy hunting over to the Fish and Game Commission.

Deukmejian Appointments to Fish and Game; Commissioner Brian Kahn and Robert Redford

Lage: How have Deukmejian's appointments been to the Fish and Game Commission and the Department of Fish and Game?

Owings: I'm not as well acquainted with them. The one he first appointed director for the department was a man who tended to straddle both sides of the fence, depending on who he was talking to. That made it a little difficult for us. Now a new man has taken his place.

Lage: And what about the commission?

Owings: The state has tended to have fish and game commissioners who were often highly intelligent men who might be in sports, or they were scientists. There have been a number of scientists on the commission, and it was helpful to have that. Ray [Raymond F.] Dasmann was on the commission for a number of years, and Ike Livermore was on the commission after he was secretary for resources. At any rate, these are men who had dealt with the big view of wildlife and heard of such things as balance and things of that nature.

We now have a commission that is made up of people who--some of them have sporting goods stores and sell guns. The last appointment was a man who raised tomatoes and seemed not to have any other particular connection.

We must have gotten well over a thousand letters to the commission, sometimes individually, and sometimes to the commission as a whole, hoping that they would be reproduced for each one. Sometimes I sent one for each person. I sometimes sent them to their homes. One stands on one's head sometimes, wondering what one is going to do to catch their attention.

I asked Robert Redford to write a letter to the chairman of the California Fish and Game Commission, Brian Kahn. I sort of scribbled out a thing he might write, and then he worded it better. He kept it simple and strong, and just good.

Kahn must have received thousands of letters. As far as we know, there was only one letter he ever answered, and that was Robert Redford's. Brian Kahn hadn't ever gotten a letter from

Robert Redford before and was much impressed by it and sent in return a letter to Redford that is three type-written single-spaced sheets about his philosophy--kind of a jumble, I thought--to win Redford over. He wanted terribly to have Robert Redford admire him. At the same time he wanted to stress the importance of the right to hunt.

Redford read it out loud to me out here on the porch and said, "I suppose I ought to answer this letter." He's quite occupied with many, many things, so he didn't get around to it. But recently he was given an award by an oil company, a conservation plaque. Brian Kahn, who had been the commission chairman but was let go, and someone else took his place, rushed up to Redford afterwards, like a long-lost brother, and talked steadily to Robert about the lion. Redford had other things on his mind--he was the speaker at this event--but he listed to Kahn and was attentive.

As Redford started to turn away, Brian said, "You and I, we would understand one another perfectly. There is this point, but don't you agree with me now that I've told you these things? Don't you agree with me now?" Redford turned and said, "No." [laughter] That just happened the other day.

The commission under Governor Deukmejian is a group of men who are not informed at all. I think the word "ecology" terrifies them. "Balance of life," or "web of life," or all these different terms that the conservation or naturalist groups talk about are something they just pass away. They think we're fools. They dismiss us as "butterfly pickers" and such.

Well-Chosen Words from Prominent People

Lage: It's very hard to know how to approach them then. You have no common language.

Owings: Exactly. That's why we're now starting out with an honorary board for the Mountain Lion Preservation Foundation in which Sharon Negri, as executive director, is doing such an outstanding job. I'm chairman of the board only because I'm so long connected, but I'm not working hard the way I used to. We have chosen this group of marvelous people who are well known, to get words from them, just the way Redford helped us so much on that particular bill, except we lost the battle. If we could have more of that kind of well-known person--.

Lage: They will listen more to the actor than to the scientist?

Owings: Yes.

I met George Schaller and we had had a several-hour's talk at George Lindsay's house. I said to him, "You have no idea of the number of times I have said, 'Now, George Schaller says--.' I then read this last line from a letter I have from you."

> [reading] With what right and what conscience can a few hunters be permitted to shoot the last lions, selfishly obtaining a little satisfaction at the cost of forever depriving thousands of others the pleasure of seeing one of these big cats in the wild?

Anyway, George Schaller wrote to Robert Bateman, whose work is so beautiful, and Bateman just wrote us--we got his letter yesterday--wanting to help in any way he could. He would like to contribute prints or do things of that sort, which we will certainly use and be very proud to use.

Lage: It seems as if some of the conservation groups, despairing of what has happened in Sacramento, have gone into more of a political approach, endorsing candidates, working to elect the right legislators, and things like that. The Sierra Club has gone in that direction, and the League of Conservation Voters. Is that something that you are inclined to get into?

Owings: Well, I did briefly, and I had a call from New York last night that went on forever. I don't like to have calls. I don't like that technique. I get them, sometimes two a night, always wanting to know the exact amount that you are going to give. They are nearly always, without fail, things that I believe in very much indeed. I don't care for that, and so I say, "Write me." The person, of course, who is being paid to do that wants to have the credit, whether you are going to give them fifty dollars or five hundred dollars.

Lage: The overall technique of working in the political arena, is that something you think is necessary?

Owings: I think it is very important, and that's why the environmental issues have suffered as much as they have during the Reagan administration.

When Reagan came in as governor of California, he wanted to veto one of the lion moratoriums. Gloria and Jimmy Stewart went to dinner at the Reagan's house, got on the subject of lions, and talked Reagan into signing it.

Lage: Had they been involved with your group?

Owings: Yes, I had just put Gloria on. I knew them through the African Wildlife Leadership Board. They feel very strongly about these issues.

There are funny ways that one ends up fighting the battles.

Lage: You have done an awful lot with persuading important people to join in with you.

Owings: Perhaps. One time I was at the Smithsonian at a formal dinner. We first were drinking, in among the elephants. Cecil Andrus [Secretary of the Interior under Carter] was there. I had a long evening dress on. I had spoken to him, but so many people were coming and going. I had down my neck a little piece of folded paper that said Cecil Andrus on it, and so I just took it out like that. I sort of smiled at him and I put it in his pocket. [laughter] I heard about it afterwards, too!

Lage: Was this a little plea for a particular thing?

Owings: It was one of my issues. I don't recall which one.

Lage: Is there more you want to talk about on the mountain lions? There is so much, as we talked before, and you have a great deal in written form, scrapbooks, papers, and things. A lot doesn't come through in the written records, though, like some of the things you are telling us that have the personal element.

Owings: Doesn't this make me sound sort of superficial and ridiculous, because I am telling you very superficial and ridiculous incidents? Sometimes I forget all about them, you know.

Lage: It is going to be very difficult to make you sound superficial, when you think what you have brought into being.

A Column in the Chronicle by Charles McCabe

Lage: In your scrapbook you have some columns by Charles McCabe on the lion. Did you want to tell about how you got his ear?

Owings: Charles McCabe wrote for the San Francisco Chronicle. First, he wrote for the sporting sheet, and it was something he didn't enjoy doing. There was a great deal of joking about how he wouldn't go

to a game, and he would get his notes from someone else, and then he would play around with other ideas. But the men loved to read him.

I went to a dinner party near San Francisco one night, and he was there. The dinner was given for me because I was doing a stitchery show at the deYoung Museum and going to have that show in a couple of nights. He took an interest in me, let us say, even in my stitchery. (He was ready to take an interest in anything!)

Later he came down here with Lady Mary, who was his wife at the time, and we sat in front of the fire, and I gave them dinner. Need I say, we got on the subject of mountain lions. He hadn't really thought about them before.

He wrote a column about the mountain lion in his regular column, called "The Fearless Spectator," that attracted a great deal of attention because it was read by more "macho" kind of men. Here they found out he was coming out for something, a thing he rarely ever, ever did. May I read you a tiny bit of it?

> [reading] "Mountain Lions Need Love Too." Everyone needs love, even a mountain lion. Nobody knows this more clearly than a lady resident of Big Sur named Margaret Wentworth Owings. She has charm, talent, and high good looks. She is mistress of an arcane craft called stitchery.
>
> Once she had a mountain lion as a friend. This beast used to roam the coastal lands, just outside her ocean front home. She became used to him, his habits and his noises. One day, a hunter killed him. Presumably, he got the fifty-dollar bounty, which California still allots to gents who present a male pelt, sixty bucks for females. [Actually, they got more than that because there were county bounties as well.--M.O.]
>
> Mrs. Owings went into a quiet rage, which has not abated with time. She formed, and is chairman of, the Committee to Repeal the State Bounty on California Mountain Lions. Few causes are so patently worthwhile.

I won't read any more, but that was the air in which he wrote it.

Lage: It's interesting, because they always accuse conservationists of talking to themselves. Here you got completely outside the circle.

Owings: I was in a number of his columns for quite a while.

Lage: I wonder what his mail was like on that column.

Owings: He sent me some of the letters, and I received letters as a result of it, just out of the blue.

There was another column, from Indianapolis, and I had never heard of the author.

> "It's Out in the Open--Woman Saves Mountain Lion." Brother, what a woman can do to you when she gets her dander up--

That's how it began, and it carried on about every step of the way. It could have filled in everything I have been talking about. [laughter]

Lage: That was something that you weren't even aware was coming?

Owings: No, I never heard of him before.

Recent Lion Politics in the Legislature, the Courts, and the Media

Owings: After we lost the last moratorium with the governor's veto it was turned over again to the Fish and Game Commission. That's when we worked on commissioners, and I have spoken about it before.

Lage: Then it was up to them to decide what the hunting requirements would be.

Owings: Yes, and they put it off for a period of time, for a so-called study that we felt was completely unqualified as a study. We sent copies of it to leading lion people, including Maurice Hornocker in Idaho and Wayne Evans in New Mexico. We had reports from them on how ridiculous the thing was--they didn't use the word "ridiculous" because they are too polite, although they must have thought it--for they let it go quite a bit.

Lage: Was this study conducted by an outside consultant?

Owings: No, just by their own men. That is another thing. There is nothing objective about it. They came out with what they wanted, as during Arnett's regime. He just threw out any parts of a study that he didn't agree with.

Lage: So their study justified resumption of hunting?

Owings: Yes, but before they set the date to resume hunting we introduced several bills, including extension of the moratorium by Tom Bates (AB 467) and another banning the use of dogs in lion hunting by Alan Pattee.

Lage: So that was just another device to limit the lion kill. Did any of those last ditch efforts come to anything?

Owings: No, and as soon as they set the date to resume hunting, we started a legal suit which, as I told you, we thought, for two or three days, we had won. Everyone called everyone in our group, and they all drank champagne and said, "We are drinking champagne!" I was down here alone and I didn't have any champagne, but it was a joyful moment. It was nice to have a joyful moment. One doesn't very often in these long, long, fights.

Lage: Now why did you say that you only thought that you had won something for a few days?

Owings: I read the court decision over carefully, went over it with a red pencil, and thought about it a lot. I thought, by golly, there are some opportunities here of winning this. The judge came out with a statement that they weren't able to open up the season and set the date for hunting because there had been no cumulative impact analysis.

Immediately, the Fish and Game Commission had an S.O.S. meeting. They were stunned by this. That they should have to have an Environmental Impact Statement never occurred to them! So they came out with a statement that an E.I.S. didn't apply to them in any way. Their answer to that was negative, but they set the opening day for hunting ahead to November 15, 1987.

To sum up the legal actions, in both 1987 and 1988 the State Fish and Game Commission approved limited trophy hunting of 190 lions yearly, but both proposals were blocked by the San Francisco Superior Court which ruled that the Department of Fish and Game's [DFG] Environmental Impact Statement was insufficient. A judge said that they were only sweeping the environmental consequences under the rug. Serious considerations including habitat loss were not addressed. That decision was upheld in October 1989 in a San Francisco Court of Appeals.

Owings: The thing that worries the Fish and Game Department was that this same terminology could apply to many things to do with fish and wildlife. Although it wouldn't displease me in the slightest, it would be a major setback for DFG and the NRA.

Lage: Do you see some of your senators and assemblymen that you have worked with back off when the NRA puts its pressure on?

Owings: I think so.

Lage: It is a lot to work against.

Owings: Yes, they are there all the time. They always use as the excuse that we are trying to take their guns away from them. It's like that Florida case recently where they voted that everyone could carry a gun, even children. I was listening to it on the Larry King show in bed a couple of nights ago. They mentioned it, and a little girl called and said, "I don't think that children should carry guns." This man was very rough, the NRA man. He said, "Well, it's to protect yourself."

She said, "Well, what if I got mad at my brother, and I shot him because I had a gun in my hand?" The man spoke very rough and said, "Well, you could just take the butcher knife and kill him, if you really wanted to kill him."

Isn't that incredible? I just get limp about the direction in which we are moving. When it embraces so many species of wildlife it is so sad.

This later work in Sacramento has been carried out by many people. The bounty part, I take most of the credit for that.

Lage: That part was very much your own operation. You had the committee, but it was more just names on the stationery?

Owings: I had those who would go up to the hearings and write letters.

Lage: When was there more of an organization involved?

Owings: It became more so when John Dunlap first took it over.

Lage: He was a legislator?

Owings: He was an assemblyman [1967-1974] and then state senator [1975-1978]. Recently, we have had paid staff which we had not had before.

Lage: When did that come about, when you started having a staff and then forming the foundation? Can you talk to me about how that came about?

Owings: Everything was this year, although we had a coalition before. Bill Yeates, whom I don't think I spoke of, was a very important person in these last few years. He began the coalition. He is a lawyer as well as a lobbyist in Sacramento for several years in the environmental field, and somehow picked up on the lion.

Lage: Does he work for a particular group?

Owings: He works for the Mountain Lion Preservation Coalition. He also works for the Planning and Conservation League.

Lage: So he brought a coalition together?

Owings: Yes.

We sent these portfolios to people when we were asking for a hundred dollars or more in gifts.

Lage: This was a portfolio of information? The corporation was founded in 1986, it says here.

Owings: This is a folder that Sharon Negri got out that we sent to people about "fact and fiction." This was to the general public. We got wonderful responses from them showing that there is an awakening interest in the saving of the lion.

Lage: So now this is really a professional organization putting out very nicely-done brochures?

Owings: We sent this to my brother, and my brother is up in the Bohemian Grove. They have different camps, and he is in the puma one. So he had his lion picture framed. "It is going to last forever," he said. That pleased me because he has never really expressed a great interest before.

Lage: Something touched his heart.

Owings: Yes.

Lage: Overall, how did your coverage in newspapers and other media come?

Owings: Bill Yeates hired a public-relations man named McElroy. He reached the newspapers and editorials. We wrote the material, and they took it to his people. So we had editorials in almost every big paper in the state. That was a lot.

Lage: But this was for the recent campaign. How about early on when you were in charge? You showed me a lot of newspaper clippings.

Owings: The one picked up from the other. Then I grew to know people and got in that way. There was always a little difficulty with the Los Angeles Times. They seem to come out in our direction now.

That's just the kind of thing we are doing now. I have told you about the troubles that we have had. But we certainly have had many, many reaffirming responses so that we feel that we will break through, but when a governor always carries a veto, this is a difficulty.

[An initiative, Prop. 117, the California Wildlife Protection Act of 1990, will ask voters in the June 6th election to approve a multi-million dollar state habitat conservation fund. It would also outlaw mountain lion hunting or trapping unless livestock or property were threatened.--M.O. Proposition 117 was passed by California voters, June 6, 1990.--ed.]

XII IMPORTANT PEOPLE

Looking at Beauty

Owings: I got out a few things I've written on a couple of issues. This first was a statement I made at a hearing on the oil drilling business. This was on April 24, 1985.

> [reading] I am Margaret Owings, environmentalist, resident of Big Sur for twenty years, living six hundred feet directly above the sea. I wish to make a broad statement about the effect on man if offshore oil drilling is introduced up the Big Sur coast. The undisturbed immensity of the vision along the heart of the Big Sur coast has left an impact on the public that is not only nationwide but worldwide.

Then I go into the visiting public, their reaction, what inspires them. And this is all just broad stuff. Maybe something could be taken out of it. Why don't I give that to you, and if you don't want to use it, don't use it. You don't need to use the whole thing so that it looks like a frozen image on stone. [See following page.]

This piece I wrote at Chaco Canyon. This is more philosophic than the archaeologist's "these stones were cut in 1292," and "this stone you can see is different, it was cut later," and "the people obviously had a lower culture than they did during this building," and so on. This is a single person's response to the place. We spent several nights there, just lying in our sleeping bags on the ground, which was sort of nice. Nat has been there more than I. Anyway, I just wrote down a lot of things.

[pause as she looks through notes] Oh, this illustrates the compartmentalized mind of man:

> [reading] Doorway leading into an enclosure, probably open to the sky at the time, and entering

> into another portal opening into the inner chamber. A sequence with a final closed vessel at the end. The mind's eye is led onward to be met by the inner sanctum. Here the Indian has picked up the rocks from the land lying in disarray, in broken heaps from broken canyon walls. Man has taken these pieces and tenderly made order, building exquisitely and sensitively a strong, straight wall, yet filled with the flaws of human effort.

Then I spoke about how Martha Graham once told me that the Indians allow a small thread of another color to enter a rug where it was least expected. It was to admit to the frailty of human beings. It let the soul in. And she said, "I tell my dancers this story, to keep this in mind as they dance, to allow the audience to enter the dance by the slightest flaw." I thought it was kind of an intriguing way of thinking. I would have to phrase it a little bit differently.

> [reading] The Indians, who moved through the land like a fish through water, created architectural spaces such as this, setting a limit on infinity. They created a little universe of their own with balance, repetition, and rhythm, each wall precisely placed to reach to another for inner harmony. Arranged by that, a person can experience different vistas, an organic whole, the light and shadow, mystique, the length between heaven and earth, the texture of the drywall stonework. Satisfying. These Indians work both artistically and functionally.

And I go on and on, just all sorts of things.

Riess: You made these notes at the time?

Owings: Yes, this I typed up from these. These were the notes I made, and then I added the Martha Graham in because I thought of that here. And then I just did different things. But there is so much of the abstract there, and meaning, that I think people haven't even begun to grasp. I thought at the time I'd like to do a little book. I was going to illustrate it myself; that was when I was doing illustrations.

Riess: What is the abstract meaning you are thinking of?

Owings: While some people were living in complete disarray and would continue nomadically on the move, these people were really <u>set</u> there, you know, and adding to themselves. I'm sure one could follow the corrections as they began rough, then they got the

For Gordon Duffy's attention
Secretary, Environmental Affairs.
State Capitol.

This is the statement I made before Mrs. Sharpless, April 24,1985 Monterey.

I am Margaret Owings, environmentalist, resident of BIG SUR for 29 years, living 600 feet directly above the sea.

I wish to make a broad statement about the effect on man - if offshore oil drilling is introduced up the BIG SUR coast.

The undisturbed immensity of the vision along the heart of the BIG SUR coast has left an impact on the public that is not only nation.-wide but world-wide.

And I wish to make an important point. Our strong reaction in opposition to offshore oil drilling along the BIG SUR coast is being made by residents who, themselves, are under strict regulation for land-use, zoning, view-sheds and respect for the coast. But this is not just for themselves but for the visiting public - 2 million cars a year pass along our coast road (and in the northern portion of the Big Sur, six to seven thousand cars a day stop to park beside the road in peak weekends or holidays.)

What do they come for? Inspiration, uplift, and the sense of infinity as they look down the coast and out to sea. "Infinity" in an otherwise over-crowded world.

Last week, a National TV Program showed spectacular spots of beauty in other parts of the world. (the great falls in South America, peaks in Nepal, desert formations in the Sahara, etc.) and the commentator said: "But equal to these, we in the United States have the BIG SUR."

Need I say, the introduction of off-shore oil rigs with their platforms and accompanying facilities, drilling muds spilling out

into the near-shore clear waters, potential oil-spills jeopardizing marine life and onshore components "fitting into" the unstable inaccessible cliffs in the heart of the BIG SUR, destroying the great silouette of beauty.

As I speak of these things - you may remind me that I have forgotton to realize that this drilling is a matter of economics. The economics of OIL.

My husband wrote a line last year before he died. It reads:

"I look at the great sweeep of earth and sea and mountain that is BIG SUR - and I ask, <u>what are the ecomomics of wonder and of harmonious living</u>? Is there a value placed on preserving and strengthening man's sense of awe and the discovery of his right place in the universe?"

Margaret Owings

Margaret Owings
Grimes Point, Big Sur, 93920

(although I was the founder and continue as the President of Friends of the Sea Otter - I chose not to direct my words to the otter (which were ably handled by our biologist, Rachel Saunde but instead <u>to man</u> - and what this intrusion will mean to man.

rocks smoother, and you know, they laid them together, just incredible, it's so beautiful.

Laura Gilpin went there with us one time and took photographs of it, and gosh, they were beautiful. But then you go into another place and you find another kiva apart, and you find it's quite different. You don't know what it is, you have to think about why. Even the way the stairs go up, whether they are invitational or--there's just a lot to think about.

[pause, looking back at her notes] I won't bother you further with this. It was nice to think about it for a second. I think I'll let that go right now. But thinking of good places and times to remember, that was one. Then the Sierras were another, and Lake Como, which I want to organize better. These are from notebooks, things I scribbled down as I went along. I wrote them [notes] on all kinds of things, you know.

I want to organize something on the Blue people of Goulimine, a last outpost on the Sahara where the dancers sit on the ground and seventy camels come in at dawn. Here I have notes on Tarrodant, at the foot of the Atlas Mountains. We went twice there, and I wrote that more carefully. You see, I just did these little scraps, but I thought out of the little scraps I could pick some things I might employ.

About the Sierras I've written: "Pool in autumn. Walked from Sunrise to Merced." Have you walked around all those pools in that place?

Riess: No.

Owings: God, it's wonderful.

> [reading] Merced Lake receives all things. All the rippling water, roaring streams, dripping ferns, finally find their way into Lake Merced before moving on. I think of Merced as a dank place, too much shadow, but the pools of rushing streams that cascade over the granite--down, down, down--beautifully musical in the autumn, each ripple like a liquid note. What was formerly rush and crash and roar is now clear, without whitewater, clear with a depth of green, clear with a depth of amber.
>
> Bodies of granite I think of as live organisms, with water polishing them as a stone sculptor does, by rubbing. And then there are the deep holes, some hollowed out by round stones, like a mortar and

> pestle, round and around for fifty years. Sometimes we think these stones are like ostrich eggs resting in the quiet gold circle of water.

Then I go on to Vogelsang, another trip. I have other books of notes like that, but I don't know if you want that kind of thing.

The Haidas and the Queen Charlotte Islands--that's another one I'd like to do. I was so happy to see the Queen Charlotte Islands on television the other day. They even had our favorite spot, Ninstints.

Before I began talking with you I thought of taking the notes out and putting them together into a book with some illustrations that I'd done, trying to string them together in some meaningful similarity as going through one mind.

Riess: Did you always carry a sketchbook or notebook with you?

Owings: Nearly always. Sometimes I'd just make a few lines, but other times I had the whole thing set up so I could work on it. Especially in Morocco and the Sahara, you had to have your materials ready. Those collages--I just put one together and had it framed beautifully and gave it to my best friend's son's wedding last week. I don't know whether they'll like it, but I liked it a lot. They said, "It's so peaceful." The sand colors, and the blocks of colors that become buildings, and the windows--it appealed to me immensely.

Riess: When I asked something about art last week you said that art threaded through it all.

Owings: It certainly did for many, many years. It is only really in the last ten years, I suppose, that it had played a very small part in my life. And then what I've done has been mostly animals or trees, or things that relate to nature, something that I want to express.

Riess: You've already discussed your art work. It seems to be far in the background in recent years.

Owings: I never seem to get around to it, in some way. [pause] In many ways it was the most important thing in my life for many years. Had I not married I would have probably been in the art museum business, and would have gotten more involved with painters and so on. That would have been interesting. A totally different life, except that having had what I had, it enriches the life that I led.

Riess: How does it?

Owings: Just appreciation of the things around me, and sensitivity to people who are creative. Creative people always interest me a lot. They are often troubled people, you know. They're not just even, grey people. They are people with ideas, and I'm drawn to them and used to share a great deal with them. I haven't had a chance to for really quite a long while.

Riess: Do you think they are more sensitive to their environment, to the space and the beauty, than other people?

Owings: I think so. Not all.

Writers--sometimes writers are so lost in their thoughts within themselves that they are blind to things, because they are thinking of things of the mind. Or people who are working on sociology, and worry about people and the dreadful things that are happening in the world, which sometimes creep up on me like a great shadow, and I wonder why I'm doing anything that I'm doing. I feel that I should really be doing everything from fighting against nuclear war to helping those people in Africa and so on.

Riess: What makes the shadow go away?

Owings: One of the things that makes the shadow go away, which is a self-seeking thing that I'm about to say, is living here, and walking out on the porch, and looking at the immensity of the world. Man's troubled ways and greedy ways, all those things that bother me so much, they fall apart. I look at the big planet that's left there, I see this big turn of the planet, and it makes me feel that way.

Riess: Do you feel that it cannot be destroyed?

Owings: Well, the nuclear blasts and the poisons in the air, those things are just so beyond--. I'm quite critical of the regime in Washington. I watch those things on television. If I didn't have television, if I hadn't had that satellite dish, which I really got for Jim so he could watch the television games!

Riess: Do you think of the museum business as another way of "saving"? Is there that about it?

Owings: Sometimes I've looked at it rather critically since I got out of it and got a perspective on it. Sometimes I think even on these digs and so on, "My god, isn't it funny, they're digging up these things that happened only yesterday. Man's little cracked pots

and old bones." It seems funny when you think of the long history, in which man is just a few seconds of time on the planet.

Georgia O'Keeffe

[Interview 5: November 12, 1986]

Riess: I have wanted to talk about Georgia O'Keeffe. Perhaps that would fit in here, where you are thinking about the great places in your life, and the time spent in New Mexico.

Owings: Georgia O'Keeffe has meant a great deal to me, from the time that I was in college at Mills--in the art department we held her in great reverence--through the time when I was at Radcliffe, in the museum course.

I went to Stieglitz's gallery [American Place], and there in that strange little gallery were all my favorite painters. Alfred Stieglitz was lying on a canvas cot in the side room with the door ajar, and Georgia O'Keeffe was walking nervously around between the paintings. I told her that I'd been out to her house. She looked rather coolly at me at that point because she doesn't like to have intruders. I had to quickly assure her that I had not intruded on her house, but that I'd gone out there with Florence Bartlett who had hoped that we might find her there. This was up at the Ghost Ranch [New Mexico].

Anyway, that was our introduction. It wasn't until 1976 that Virginia and Ansel Adams brought her down here, along with Juan Hamilton, and we all sat out on the porch. It was a magnificent, a super day, and we talked and we laughed a lot, and we took some photographs of one another.

Among other things, a little incident occurred that I like to laugh about. It was quite clear that Georgia was very struck by the immensity of the view. Her eyesight was poor, but she could see the bigness and the angles. Angles have always interested her. (Later, when she came to the house, I gave her a notebook and she drew different angles of the mountains to the south, and then drew different angles of our house against the mountains and so on.) But we went out and sat at the side entrance here, and she saw the little building over the edge of the cliff.

She said, "What's that?" I said, "Oh, it's just my little studio." She said, "I want to go down there."

Well, there are steps going down to it, and to begin with I used those as an excuse. I said, "They are very rough." (Actually she likes rough things, but I thought maybe she was too old to go down there, which of course didn't turn out to be the way it was at all.) I said, "Oh, I can't possibly take you down there now because it's so disorganized. It's filled with cobwebs. It's a place I've been putting things, just stacking up things in there. Different things, my art work or the kind of thing that relates to my studio." (Actually I had several pictures of Georgia O'Keeffe's thumbtacked on the log wall--not that I wouldn't have left those for her to see.)

She said, "I want to go." And when she makes up her mind, she makes up her mind.

Finally, when she saw I wasn't going to let her go, she said, "I'll tell you. When you come to Abiquiu next I'll take you out to my place where I keep all my paintings, my storage room, and you'll see how disorderly I am. Because what I do, I open a door a crack, I open it about four inches, and then I push the paintings in, and then I quickly close the door and lock it and go away." So with that I naturally had to take her down there.

And, of course, when I got down there it was exactly as I'd said it was; things were piled up. I got some of my things out, and she looked at them. When I have things in order down there the whole wall slips back, but it was really filled with little white egg sacs of black widow spiders. I took her out a few things, but it was all disorderly.

I had quite a few things from a recent trip to Morocco. I had done things in collage, and papers that I'd bought on the left bank in Paris, and I did collages of the buildings and different incidents that happened in those incredible tunnels of beauty in the cities. Fez and so on. So she saw it.

Riess: Did she react strongly to your work?

Owings: Well, she was interested in my black and white, especially. Also, she could see it better. Though nothing was really white because the lights had been sort of blown out, so I didn't have a light on. There were many flaws in my studio.

Really, for twenty years if someone had said, "Would you like to have a visit from Georgia O'Keeffe, have her come down to your studio?" I would have said, "God yes!" And here this happened this way instead.

Anyway, probably two months later we were out in New Mexico and I went up to see her and have lunch with her. Juan was there. He said to me suddenly, "Aren't you going to ask Georgia if she is going to show you her storage place for all of her paintings?" I said, "Oh yes, I was, but I hardly dared, and I wasn't sure she remembered."

"Oh yes, she remembers." So we walked across the courtyard. It had burglar alarms and this kind of a lock and that kind of a lock, and Juan undid all those. And then he opened the door and turned on the light.

I looked around. Everything was painted white because she was losing her sight. (And I might add quickly she made almost no mention of it at all, so people might not even know it unless they were told it in advance, or she felt her way with a cane, or Juan came quickly and grabbed her elbow or something.) In this great white room was a table the size of my kitchenette here, covered in white--white paper or white oilcloth, I don't recall. Absolutely immaculately in order. On this table she could lay things out, or they would wrap things, or unwrap things. She had the pieces of tissue paper she would put between things. Everything was just perfect!

I said to her, "This isn't fair! I showed you my studio only because you told me you had such disorder in your studio." And Juan looked down at her, and then he looked over at me. He said, "You want me to tell you something, Margaret? She's been working on this all morning in preparation for your coming." [laughter]

One of the things she was working on at that time was a book, a book of which I have one of the original copies. She wanted me to give her advice on it, which pleased me no end. So we went through the book, whether she should have this picture here or there, and she wanted to say this little bit about this person, a small incident, sometimes it was just a line, sometimes it was a paragraph, several times a bit more writing than that. Always in simple honesty, just simply honesty.

She was not a writer the way some painters are writers, doing a thing in a flowery way. She wrote with just straight, stark simplicity. There were vignettes of her life, many to do with Stieglitz. It was nice to realize how much she thought about him, because it was a strange marriage. He was so much older than she. She had gone to New York to study some art and gone into his studio and met him. I think he must have given her one look--just a terribly striking young woman, just striking, the way she stood and the way she held her head, and those magnificent hands.

Which reminds me of the time we sat here in front of the fire--this was another time when she came out--and we got her pictures of her hands out, and then she laid her hands out. She was about ninety-three, and age had caught up with her hands, but they were still strong hands, characterful hands, and with a definite quality to them. So then I got my hands out and put them beside hers. [laughs] I wasn't sure what she'd think about putting my hands beside hers. I have a picture of my hands that someone took, so I rushed in to get that. Nothing like trying--this magnificent woman, trying to even compare with her! But we had a lot of laughs over everything.

When Nat would come in he would make her laugh so that she'd just throw back her head. It's a thing she often didn't do with people, and also didn't do when there were many people around. She would remain quite silent. But Nat just tickled her. He knew exactly the buttons to press. And she had such a good time with him, too.

In that big room was most of O'Keeffe's work. Big works, like the painting with the clouds. She loved to tell about doing the clouds, about how she got the canvas because, you know, it was so big, and then about how she hired a double garage that went deep so that she could stretch the whole thing out and work on it there. And then having to take it down to the Amon Carter or one of the museums in Texas to show, and that was no small thing.

She did clouds quite a bit. She would have two paintings on her walls, and they were always different every time. One would be the clouds across one wall, and under it would be a low bookcase with Juan Hamilton's black pottery. The less she could see, the more she liked to feel, so she would feel them.

Riess: His pots are very smooth and big?

Owings: Yes. He let me work on one once when I was there. He goes over and over and over them. He told us at length how he did the things. She did some too, she did some little pots. Whether she finished them or not, it gave her great satisfaction. It was written up quite a bit that she was doing pots now. That was one of the many things that Juan did to give her continued life, because there were many things that she couldn't quite handle now.

Riess: I hadn't realized that he was a fellow artist when he came into her life.

Owings: Well, he came in really just because he admired her so. He was probably in his late twenties and she was eighty-five. He came to the back door and knocked and asked her if she had any work that

he could do. [1973] She said no, and closed the door. Very rude.

And then she remembered what he looked like, so she opened the door again and peered at him, and said, "What do you do?" He said he did ceramics, but he had thought he could do things such as crates; he did woodwork a great deal and he thought he might be able to help her with crates and things of that sort. So she said, "Well, come in." She asked him if he'd had any lunch, and he hadn't. So Candelerio, who was her cook--beautiful name, and she did beautiful food--she fixed a lunch for Juan.

And then bit by bit Juan began to open to her, and she found that he was a very highly educated young man. He did graduate work in fine arts [Claremont College]. He began to help her with her letters. He typed well, did those things well, so he could do that with her. He could also help answer letters when she didn't wish to. They had a sort of simple way: she'd say, "I probably better just say this," and he'd do it.

It was a great relief to her, because she had primarily Spanish-American girls who couldn't do these things. Although from time to time she'd have a good secretary, she had a tendency to quarrel with them after a while, so it was sort of a transient thing. But Juan filled in there. He began then to start doing her correspondence about arranging about shows, and dealing with people who wandered by. She didn't like to have people. Very few people did she let come out to the house.

She always wanted a very high price for things; from the very beginning she wanted a high price, and she stuck to it to the very last. So she made quite adequate funds and was able to redo the old house that she bought out there, which she bought--she said as she pounded on the door: "I bought this house because of this door!" and she pounded on it.

Beside her front door she had a ladder, a wonderful ladder. It was all natural wood, and it was very, very old. She loved to climb that ladder. She just <u>loved</u> ladders. And she would climb it and stand up on the roof. Her picture was often taken up there, because she seemed to almost float in the air. Beyond it you could see these red barrancas, mountains and things.

Riess: Was she a solitary soul? Without Juan Hamilton might she have become a recluse?

Owings: Oh, much more so. Not that he was one to push people at her or to want to see people himself. He'd go down to town on nights once in a while and see a lot of young people, and drink wine and stuff like that.

He never lived on her property; he bought a piece of property some miles from Abiquiu, along a dirt road that had rocks almost the size of his pottery. They were so big. And he would go bumping over these. You couldn't possibly go in your own car. She loved it. She hardly ever went up there, but whenever we came she'd say, "I want to go." So we'd all crowd into the front seat. It was an old truck, and we'd go bumping over the place.

She had in the living room some of my favorite paintings of hers. At the end of the room was one with black in it. She explained she had had to have an operation, and she'd been unconscious on the table. Everything was black, and then suddenly she saw a light come down, blackness and then this light breaking its way down. That was one I liked very much indeed, and she had that up quite a bit.

On walls around the other side she had--she had many artist friends of the time of Stieglitz, so she would have John Marins and Arthur Doves, some wonderful Arthur Dove paintings. (He happened to be one of my favorites.) And Marsden Hartley. She never sold anything of anyone else's, she always was giving those away. She'd give them to a museum or to someone whose friendship she valued. But it was fascinating, of course, to see these. Sometimes they were even put up with thumbtacks.

She always wore a Calder pin. He did it for her. It was a wire, twisted around and around. It did things to itself. It was like a brass wire, and she always wore it right up here. [gesturing] She wore either black or white. It looked especially well with the black.

Riess: And that was her only ornament?

Owings: That was the only ornament I ever saw on her. She wore a wonderful black hat, and I have pictures of it.

[tape interruption]

Owings: [showing pictures] Now, here she's looking very glum. This is a glum one. I found it just the other day.

Riess: [reading] "Taken by Juan Hamilton, and given to us 23 December 1978 when we went to Abiquiu."

Owings: That was his birthday. Nat and I thought we ought to give him something. He'd been working a little in wood, and had some fruit tree wood, apple and different fruit trees, all ancient trees that were up in this dry area where he had his house. We went up and

looked at them, and immediately told him about a much finer tree we had. [laughter] It was an apricot tree that we had right by the back entrance to our property, and it had a trunk this big around. It must have been fifty or sixty years old, and every year except in the worst frost years it would bear the most delicious apricots, even though a big cottonwood sort of leaned over it. But a great wind came and blew it down. It was a great disappointment to us because it was part of the character of the whole place.

So we told Juan about it, and Georgia became equally interested: "You must go down, Juan, and get it."

They appeared on a day that we weren't there, but we had a renter who was a great admirer of Georgia O'Keeffe. He never thought he'd have the privilege of showing her an apricot tree, but he heard a saw out there, and so he went out to see who was taking things away. There was Juan, and Georgia was standing beside him, talking about the tree.

This renter, well, he felt he had met the goddess of the world! He wanted to do a book on her, and we had to tell him several times, "Well, Georgia's already had several books done." Well, he would do something. "He could really give her great publicity." "That's not what Georgia wants; she doesn't want publicity." "But he could take her places!" "She doesn't want to go anyplace; she wants to be either at home or just at some incidental things, out at the Ghost Ranch, or Abiquiu."

She liked to come down to our house in New Mexico and always came when invited. I'd feed them lunch, and that was a pleasure. We were pleased and flattered that she wanted to come, because she just didn't usually want to come anyplace. But we had a lot of good times.

Riess: Did she ever visit your studio in New Mexico?

Owings: Yes. By that time, though, I had sold most of the things I had done out there, so I just had looms, the big loom, and some of my stitcheries. I don't think she was ever particularly interested in the stitcheries, but she looked at them politely.

One of the times when we were out there Georgia had gone up in Juan's attic, sort of an A-frame attic. She had been helped up the ladder steps, and then he had a canvas cot very close to the ground, and he helped her down onto it, and she went to sleep. She slept for about an hour, and that's when I was working on some of this pottery, having a lot of fun with them all together. Juan

hadn't married Anna Marie at that time. That was a little bit later.

That day Nat admired a piece of raku-ware. Juan had gone to Japan and observed and studied with some of the Japanese masters of the raku-ware kind of thing--I think. (If he reads this he might correct me and say he'd done it before.) But here was this big bowl, white with sort of reddish earth from the adobe, all of which he'd found just right there. Those bowls are never just completely round; there are always little imperfections in their roundness that make them fascinating.

Well, Nat admired this one so much. (As we were going down the ladder we passed it.) Juan said, "Wait a minute! Come on down here." So we all got down and then he climbed up and brought the raku-ware down and gave it to us as a gift, which was terribly nice.

Soon after that it was Christmas, and I had it on the mantlepiece in our house at Jacona. We had guests for Christmas dinner, and just as Nat was carving the turkey I started speaking about Juan and his pottery. And with that, I jumped up from the table and ran to the mantlepiece to hurry to bring it back to the table for everyone to touch. I had two big cushions in front of the fire and I didn't see them, and so I fell and broke the raku-ware into a hundred pieces.

Later Juan said that he could have mended it. The only trouble was that I cut my eye almost open and had to have my eye sewn together again. So we weren't exactly at that point thinking of saving the pieces. When I came back from the doctor's and so on I didn't think of it for a bit, at least for twenty-four hours. And then when I did get up and feel my way into the living room I said, "Where's the pot?" They said, "You don't have to worry about that, Margaret, that's all gone, all gone." And really, I don't think Juan ever quite forgave me for not saving all the little pieces.

Riess: Did you learn anything from Georgia?

Owings: One couldn't help but observe, and learn from observation. Her response to things.

Riess: How did she feel about nature, for instance?

Owings: Well, of course she just loved the country around Abiquiu, and around the Ghost Ranch. There is that reddish earth, and the barrancas that were all washed down from water and made marvelous shadows in the morning and late in the evening.

Color meant everything to her. Color came first, and form. Perhaps they went hand in hand. And the colors out there are so astonishing, and she knew just the hour for just the colors that she would see if she walked out.

In the summertime when she would go out, she would drive an old car, bumping over the earth, and then stopping someplace where she'd have just about a foot of shadow, because the sun was so hot. She would sit on the ground and she did many of her sketchings there and some of her watercolors too, because she worked on paper as well as in oil. Then she would bring these things back home and work on them.

I would say she loved nature, but it had to be simple. The reason she loved this place [Big Sur] was the forms that she saw, the mountains plunging into the sea. The water, the sea, just thrilled her terrifically. The silhouette of the redwoods, the beaches to the north. And she loved flowers. Once in a while they were garden flowers, but of course if they would be a wildflower she liked that.

In her earlier years with Stieglitz she began a series of enlarging flowers, often small flowers, into magnificent flowers. Up at Lake George, where his enormous family was, she would be surrounded. She liked to be by herself, so she would go off and find a place she could do flowers.

I was involved with the Environmental Defense Fund at the time I met her in 1976, and I used to talk to her about it because I was also trying desperately to raise money for them. I talked to her about the mining that they were getting ready to commence around Chaco Canyon. She was especially intrigued about Chaco Canyon, just as I was. I mean, there is something psychological and mystical, something very deep. She had sensed that from the forms, and again, shadows. Putting together a wall the way they did it.

She phoned me one evening about the day before New Year's. I was here at Big Sur, I wasn't out there. And she said, "Margaret, we are just making out my income tax gifts, and I decided I'd like to have you tell me what we should give to." [laughs] Of course, I was torn instantly about the otters, and these different things I was involved with, but I thought, "No, I've got to be more careful with that, and not just sound as if it were my own interests completely." So I told her about the Environmental Defense Fund.

That place where they were battling is called [spells out] Bisti: it was the Chaco Canyon region where they wanted to do strip mining, which was going to include, and still is including, many of these incredible things, that bit of history, of American Indian history, that had never been unearthed. She became interested in Bisti, and for three consecutive years she gave funds to EDF for their work of that nature, including Four Corners where, of course, the damage was so immense.

One of the times when she was here I remember we were just walking up there, Nat and Georgia and myself. Suddenly Georgia turned and looked at Nat, and she said, "I want this house. I want you to will me this house, Nat." And then she remembered that I was standing about three inches from her, and she looked over at me with a laugh and sort of a sly look out of the corner of her eyes to see what my reaction was to that. Anyway, we joked quite a bit about it, so that for several years after that we referred to it as "her house."

When some places were for sale here I called her one time. I thought, "Oh, she might come in another month," because I was very, very busy doing things. Juan called the next day and said, "We're getting on the plane and we'll be there eight o'clock tomorrow night." Well, that threw me! [laughter] At any rate, we took her around, but she didn't like any of the houses because she liked ours so much.

Another funny thing: that wonderful black hat of hers. We'd have it around, she'd wear it out on the porch, or any place we went, or if we went on a picnic she'd always wear it, and she wore it off in the desert. She wore it all the time, and it got older and older looking, of course. But it had a good angle to it.

Once when we were together Juan said, "Georgia's going to give me this hat someday." He put it on his head. It wasn't right for him at all, and we all saw that it wasn't right for him. Then Juan put it on Nat's head, and Nat has an enormous head, so it just sat on top of his head.

I grabbed it off of Nat's head and put it on mine. Really, it was just a perfect fit. So I said, "Oh, <u>this</u> is where it should go!" Well, she didn't know. And I said, "But Georgia, don't forget, you're getting a whole house in Nat's will. Why don't you will me this hat?" [laughter]

One very funny thing happened--Jack Anderson wrote it up--when she was living in Abiquiu. The nuclear lab [Los Alamos] was there, and everyone was suspicious of everyone else, you know, that miserable awfulness. She hated everything to do with the

nuclear bomb; she said it did not sound entirely American, and she chose to vote for Wallace. She voted for Wallace because "he stood for what she believed in."

Well, the FBI went through the votes of Abiquiu--probably only about six people voted there--and they found out how she had voted. This came out in the paper. They felt this put her in a very questionable state, and they had guards watching around her house as a result of this. Can you believe it?

An Oriental came and stayed in her house, like a house-sitter. He was probably a painter, probably one of the great Japanese painters. Anyway, she gave her house to him when she went down to visit her sister in Florida. Again, the FBI watched it. This oriental person had no visitors at all, never spoke to anyone, and only emerged out of the house when he went away. They decided after a while that--they took her off the list. Ridiculous!

Riess: Yes, it really is.

Owings: I must tell you more about perhaps the most beautiful room of all in her house there, the living room. It was a room that was done in adobe that was almost flesh-colored. It wasn't the brown adobe of our house or the tan adobe, it was almost pinky-flesh. And yet it was adobe with sand in it.

You had to go through a courtyard, and then you stepped down some steps and through a little corridor past a little dining room, and then into this glorious room. All the end of the room was glass, and outside the glass was sort of an Arthur Rackham old, old willow tree. Twiggy things shooting out in all directions. It was obvious that it had been there forever. You could see the light through this, and the silhouette of that tree there was just superb.

And then there was a ledge, like a step, and on that she had been collecting the black stones. Long before she met Juan, who began the black work up at her house, she would bring them home from all kinds of places. Sometimes she'd bring home a dried leaf and put it there. She brought home one of our leaves. We have a picture of her holding it up there and examining it, and when I went to her house, there it was. It had become very much like a lacework, and that intrigued her.

Then there was the fireplace. She had an Indian come in and she wanted him to build a fireplace and she just showed him with her hands how she wanted it done. (She found out later that he had never done a fireplace.) But he had it set off the ground

about two feet, as we have ours. This wonderfully-shaped fireplace was just molded into the flesh-colored adobe.

Right beside it there was a sunken black box, a cut-out rectangle, and it had been lined with black, black matte paint. And fitted inside that was a magnificent skeleton of a coiled rattlesnake. She had a piece of glass she laid over it, but if you wanted to touch it you could take the glass off and touch it.

In that room she always had two paintings, one large painting, and then another painting at the end of the room. She never had her strongest paintings there; for some reason this was the way she wanted it. More often in pastel colors rather than the brilliant colors that she often used.

The dining room was very small. In that room we had the party for Juan's birthday on the 23rd of December. We went there a number of times, but that one I particularly remember because when Nat entered she pointed to where he was to sit at the table. It was against a high adobe wall, and hanging on that wall was a painting about four feet high and two feet wide, stretching up. He saw <u>instantly</u> what it was--and I didn't. It was the Washington Monument. It just went up and out of sight in the sky, the different shades of the white of the monument.

She also had done a piece of sculpture out of wire, hammered some of it. It was a twisted wire. We often looked at it and held it in our hands, because it could sort of jounce a little. It had a Calder kind of feeling, in a way. Juan talked her into having it enlarged.

First she had it enlarged about six feet high--it was only about a foot high--and there were these big curlicues and all kinds of shapes, very nice. She kept that out in a little courtyard right beside the dining room. Later it was made much larger, and I think it was shown at the new wing of the National Gallery in Washington. I don't know whether it's there now or not, but it's the only sculpture piece she ever did, and she took quite a bit of pleasure in it.

Riess: I've seen a very funny piece you wrote, a parody of a newspaper report on the social aspects of a visit from Georgia O'Keeffe in 1981.

Owings: Yes. They couldn't get over the dinner. She likes to eat at six o'clock sharp, and a very simple meal, except she likes sometimes strange things. Here this whole business was put in the newspaper! I'll give it to you, and what I wrote. [See following page.]

a dinner including Georgia O'Keeffe
which I carried further on next page,

Royal Ceremonies For Ansel Adams

a humorous second chapter

November 15, 1981

By Anne Germain

Peninsula Life Editor

THEIR MAJESTIES, the king and queen of Sweden, will be paying court Wednesday in New York City to his distinguished eminence, The Master himself, our own Ansel Adams, in ceremonies at the Museum of Modern Art.

This is because Ansel is the first American to be chosen to receive the Erna and Victor Hasselblad Gold Medal and the Hasselblad Award of $20,000, and King Carl XVI Gustaf and Queen Sylvia are even now hastening to be there for the ceremonies. Dear King Carl Gustaf, only too aware of The Master's worldwide and well-earned pre-eminence, felt that no lesser personage than his royal self must make the presentation, and that's the way it will be.

And it's quite fitting that the ceremony take place in the Museum of Modern Art, since Ansel was a founder of the first curatorial department devoted to photography there, in 1940.

During this past week, Ansel and Virginia have been enjoying a little visit in their Carmel Highlands home with the legendary painter Georgia O'Keeffe, who lives in Abiquiu, New Mexico. Today is her 94th birthday but 'twas observed Monday evening with a little dinner at the home of James and Mary Alinder of Pebble Beach. (Mary is Ansel's administrative assistant and editor of his autobiography and you all know Jim, the remarkable director of Friends of Photography. You didn't? My dear, in his four years here the membership of the non-profit Friends organization has zoomed from a thousand to over ten times that, making it the largest group of its kind in the world.)

The birthday dinner menu was thrilling, naturally, provided as it was by A Moveable Feast with wines from the Allinders' cellar. It all began with petrale sole in salmon stock with Santa Cruz mountain crayfish and saffron (and Chateau Montelena Chardonnay '75). Then grilled loin of lamb with basil and garlic persillade, spaghetti squash, endive, fresh asparagus etc. (and Chateau Gruaud-Larose '49). Then spinach salad with nasturtiums and

cot souffle with cold rum ice-cream sauce (Champagne Roederer). Perfection.

Miss O'Keeffe loved it and plans more visits here before her first century comes to an end.

I wrote this after reading the article in the Monterey Herald about Ansel + the O'Keeffe dinner.

↓ M.W.O

Neglectfully, Miss O'Keeffe's following meals during the next three days at the tiny damp home of the Nathaniel Owings' were not recounted. Truly, it was a "moveable Feast" but with varieties only comparable with the Allinders' cellar filled with Chateau Montelena Chardonnay. Miss O'Keeffe selected a Japanese brand of Beer in the battle along with an artichoke and a vegetarian casserole flavored with that rare gourmet taste of stale bread crumbled among cheeses and fried onions.

As the rains came tumbling down the O'Keeffe party lay in wet beds, Georgia alone begging for the Owings' couch before the fireplace. (The Owings, you know) are following that bit of patriotic wisdom of turning off the furnace regardless of whether the house-guests are King Carl Gustaf and Queen Sylvia of Sweden or the stoic Georgia O'Keeffe who selected the outdoor porch instead of the house, clothed in her nightie and three kamonas - the outer one being Japanese in style to match the Japanese foods that at one moment were heaped upon her plate by young Juan and his wife Anna-Marie and their young one-year old Albert who steered his own course with no question in his mind that squashed avacado was the gourmet delight.

The O'Keeffe departure from the Owings also may have differed slightly from the easier step from the Adams front door to the waiting car. Miss O'Keeffe found herself carried over the watery entrance, brushed through the ferns and wet bamboo - up the path with the ocean booming beneath her. It was a dramatic exit from the stage which led up the Big Sur road through the tumbled rocks towards her next quiet birthday party in a warm luxury San Francisco Hotel.

One of the rare moments we cannot omit relates to the grand occasion when Miss O'Keeffe was taken to Nepenthe for lunch. Raining it was, but we arranged to use the back door for entrance to the restaurant permitting only a few puddles to be walked through. Upon our departure, I led Miss O'Keefe to the white car which Juan was to bring to the back door. It was a hurry to reach the car - and I opened its door and shoved Miss O'keefe into the front seat - only to perceive that the driver was a total stranger. I then quickly yanked her out - back into the rain and walked her around the car to another white car in which Juan awaited us. Miss O'Keefe said but one thing. It was simple and to the point - "jesus Christ" were the words.

[tape interruption]

Owings: She didn't know what to do with her paintings. She really wanted to put them up at the Ghost Ranch, which she loved so much. But then of course they realized they'd have to have a guard there all the time, and very few people would come. It's really remote, you know. Still, she wanted it, and much of our talk here in this house was about the gallery that someday she would have.

In the end a whole second story was going to be added to part of the art gallery of the Santa Fe Museum of Art. Nat got Ed Barnes, who was a great architect, and just a great friend, a marvelous person. We knew he'd like her and we knew she'd like him. So it all worked out well there. She was going to have a room about the size of this room where she could have one division so things could change from time to time, but it would be the O'Keeffe room.

Riess: She would endow it.

Owings: Yes, and it would be that. But at any rate, that project failed.

Riess: When you talk about Ghost Ranch--I've been out there and seen the Presbyterian retreat place there. That's not what you mean by Ghost Ranch, is it?

Owings: Yes. It's a house that she first rented from a Mr. Pack. There are several adobes, getting more crumbled every decade. She bought one of them. First she rented it, and then she bought it. She liked to get away from the world. [laughing] Abiquiu was too much. People kept calling her and so on, and so she'd go up to Ghost Ranch with her cook, who would drive for her--otherwise she was a great driver and used to tell us how fast she always drove.

[going through her file on O'Keeffe] I got her to give some money to the Sierra Club Foundation. They also applied it to the Bisti-Chaco region of New Mexico. I put those letters in the file there. I thought it was nice to have people realize that she had done those things.

This is one of the last letters she ever wrote. She didn't remember about the spelling of names: o-w-i-n-s. [reading letter] "It is a long time since we were with you at your fantastic house, but it is still very vivid for me, and the drive in the rain as we left you was fantastic, not to be forgotten. So good to be with you. Always with best memories. Sincerely, Georgia." [See following page.]

[looking through notes] This one: "Juan and I were speaking of you the day your letter arrived. We had thought of how fine it would be to visit your house in the clouds above the ocean."

Wallace and Mary Stegner

Owings: [The section on the Stegners incorporates substantial written additions.] Wally and Mary Stegner, the inseparable two! We met them first at the Adamses and found them both akin to ourselves. We were having cocktails at the Adamses standing beside that large window that opens out, not to the sea, but to the steep rocky slopes dense with succulents and bits of paintbrush and sprawled ceanothus. Although I had heard Wally speak several times, relating to Sierra Club events or at the series of Wilderness Conferences, it was not until that afternoon that we were to personally meet.

The year was in the early sixties, and as soon as we brought them down to our Big Sur house they wanted to live here, or nearabouts, from then on, although their home was in Los Altos, where Wally was close to his Stanford classes, and not far from San Francisco for events that pleased them, and not far from the airport from whence they were constantly flying for a variety of destinations, sometimes related to Wally's writing, sometimes lectures, sometimes meetings in Washington or New York, or sometimes just looking for a new place to live. They had a little place in Greenboro, Vermont, and wrote short notes to us always with a touch of humor, such as: "Pretty soon snow. Pretty soon Stegners come home, because our waterline lies right out on the ground, and our joints lie right out on the surface of our skin. Look for the old couple with the canes."

As time passed, we travelled with them, often in relation to the National Parks Advisory Committee. This found us one period in the West Indies, another in Jasper National Park, and another in the Grand Canyon. Mary and Wally came to visit us in Jacona in the Pojoaque Valley, and immediately set out to buy an old adobe across the dirt road from our house. This in the end was withdrawn from them since by then the owner had other agreements to sell it to Mike and Mary Lou Williams, a talented, environmentally-minded couple.

In 1968 we were to join with the Stegners at Mexican Hat and climb into Martin Litton's old dories and start down the Colorado. I was so innocent. I was <u>so</u> innocent. As we stepped into the dories I noticed I had to get my feet wet, and I tried to jump

LETTER FROM GEORGIA O'KEEFFE

★ Black Bird with Snow-Covered Hills . . . design contributed by Georgia O'Keeffe of the United States of America to benefit UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund. ★ L'oiseau survolant des collines . . . composition de Georgia O'Keeffe (Etats-Unis d'Amérique) — offerte à l'UNICEF, le Fonds des Nations Unies pour l'enfance. ★ Pájaro y montañas cubiertas de nieve . . . obra de Georgia O'Keeffe, de los Estados Unidos de América. Contribución al UNICEF, el Fondo de las Naciones Unidas para la Infancia. ★ Черная птица над снежными холмами — рисунок Джорджии О'Кифф (Соединенные Штаты Америки), подаренный Детскому фонду Организации Объединенных Наций (ЮНИСЕФ). ★ 雪山黑鸟 … 乔治亚·奥基夫（美国）画 赠给联合国儿童基金会. ★ Schwarzer Vogel im Winter . . . von Georgia O'Keeffe, USA, zugunsten von UNICEF, dem Kinderhilfswerk der Vereinten Nationen.

This note was an heroic effort to write by hand--after a visit of three days with us--a note. She is almost completely blind now, but manages very well and rarely speaks of it. She loves the sounds of the sea and the sea lions; she can hear quite well.--Margaret Owings, 1986 [see reverse]

Dear Owings:

It is a long time since we were with you at your fantastic house -- but it is still very vivid for me. And the drive in the rain as we left you was fantastic and not to be forgotten. So good to be with you always -------- with best memories.

Sincerely,

Georgia -

into the boat without putting my feet in the water. I got in, though, and I thought, "Well, they'll dry pretty soon." I was wet from then on! I slept in my clothes, I did everything in the same clothes.

In different areas that were relatively smooth you jumped overboard, and Harold Gilliam, who was on the dories too, did a lot of jumping overboard. He always wore a white pith helmet and he had a white shirt on that was drip-dry. The rest of us all sort of had khaki or safari-like things on that didn't drip dry at all, and they looked very wet when they were wet. We looked different. Harold had a special note.

The first evening we pulled up on shore and we had steaks, the only fresh meat of the trip, and there was a sense of great serenity. But next morning we approached a roar unlike any I had ever heard. It sounded like a jet flying low between the canyon walls. And when we pulled over to the shore to climb onto a rock, we viewed what obviously appeared to me the route to oblivion.

A young lawyer from San Francisco was rowing our boat. He came well prepared, with a camera attached to the bow and a sound machine clamped to the side of the boat. He told me to lean forward and turn the camera on and take hold of the sound recorder to register the "oblivion"--when down we went, dropping about fourteen feet into a whirlpool.

I didn't realize it was going to drop so much. I thought rapids just went through stones at a great pace, not dropping down like a waterfall. They'd told us that we had to keep out of this whirlpool, and it's dangerous having your life jackets on because you can get caught under the boat when it goes over. That alarmed me a little because I had on my life jacket and was relying on it full force!

Our oarsman was just trying to keep out of this whirlpool when his oar broke. Nat and I had watched them tie extra oars in the bottom of the boat at the beginning. They tied them very firmly because they didn't want to lose them. Nat and I were able to untie the top oar in five seconds, this thing that was roped and knotted a hundred times, and get it out and get it into the oarlock and get it into his hand. Then he pulled hard again to keep from going into this whirlpool, and it broke again! At that point it was all over, as far as I knew! The water was coming up over us and our sort of half-sunken boat was washed down.

All I can say is that when hope was gone, we suddenly washed ashore. This particular vignette of the trip was photographed by a man standing on the large rock above us, while I had clutched in

my hand that damn microphone. Nat said to me, "Give me your hand, dear." Six months later we were shown the completed film with sound effects. Suddenly, there we were, and the voice accompanying the film said, "Here we see Nat Owings and Wally Stegner together in this pile of water. Listen to Nat's voice, speaking to Stegner." And sure enough, there was Nat's voice heard through the din, "Give me your hand, dear."

It was altogether a magnificent experience, with the rough waters and the glassy calm waters, tumbling or drifting. And the shadows from those walls of rock! We were only to see one other raft for a number of days. It put us out to think we weren't alone. It was a messy black raft called "The Pig Pen" and it was rowed by a huge man with a long, fuzzy beard, at a time when no one wore beards, and long fuzzy hair to his shoulders. In contrast, his passengers were two couples, two handsome men, and two magnificent women dressed in pink and white.

We scorned them in an unfriendly way when we noted that they floated behind their raft a large plastic clorox container which apparently was filled with red wine. They would haul it up and take a swig around the party, then let it drift back again. It reminded me of the winter days my brother and I were in the Pyrenees and the French carried over their shoulders a pigskin from which they squeezed red wine directly into their mouths with a hoot and a French curse as they skied down those steep slopes at Garvani. (I might add that those of us on this trip down the Grand Canyon did not believe in drinking alcohol before evening, and it was a great feeling to sense our superiority.)

We did, quite unexpectedly, exchange a beautiful word with them. Coming around a bend of the river, we were in sight of an enormous amphitheater, hollowed out on the left side wall of the canyon. It was like the stage of a great opera house. We pulled ashore. Harold Gilliam, who often sang as he clung to a rope trailing one of our own rafts, dashed up to the center of the stage. Dressed in his white perma-pressed shorts and shirt and white topi, he began to sing an aria. His voice was loud and quite marvelous. Around the bend of the river came "The Pig Pen," and suddenly one of the young women in pink shorts and the broad-brimmed petal-like pink hat, arose from her seat in the moving raft and answered Harold's aria in a melodic voice. She was an opera singer. It became a sanctified moment.

The Stegners and the Owingses left the expedition at Bright Angel Lodge, and our seats were taken by Alfred Heller and party. While we were riding on mules up the slow trail out of the canyon, Alfred Heller was "enjoying" Lava Falls, which is a sudden and stupendous experience, according to Alfred, in retrospect, never

to be forgotten. Wally Stegner remarked, "A river is always passing, but always there."

Riess: Had you more to say about Wallace Stegner? I realize he's a friend more than an influence, but he does fit right in here as a nature-oriented writer.

Owings: Yes, all right.

Here's a letter, February 8, 1967, after Wally and Mary came to dinner in Big Sur and spent the night. Comments at the close of this long letter are pure Wally and Mary:

> Mary is down speaking English to a visiting Romanian. She finds the damnedest things to do. I am gloomily writing a speech for the Texas Historical Association. I hope you are better employed. And thanks, thanks for that lovely stay. Up to the point of collapse, I enjoyed the evening like mad, and even hung over I found the morning magical. I don't have to tell you how Mary found the whole stay. She thinks you live in the most beautiful place in this galaxy. Love, Wally."

Another time I received a suggestion from Wally about starting a "Friends of the Coyote Club," a proposal due to an incident the night before at their home in Los Altos:

> Some creature [he wrote], I presume a coyote, and I would guess the lamed coyote we recently saw trying to hunker down to get a drink out of the swimming pool, found a sack of hoof and horn meal fertilizer sitting on the floor of the carport, and tore it open and ate about five pounds of it. That argues <u>something</u>, probably hunger. Maybe we could stake out James Watt. He's got both hoofs and horns, as well as a fat head, and he might even be nourishing.

Need I say, we saw eye to eye about James Watt and tended to spend hours talking about him.

Shifting from coyotes to sea otters, he wrote at Christmas:

> This is to wish you happiness...a nice rocking kelp bed, a rock on your stomach, an abalone on the rock, a row of admiring spectators on your cliff. And so farewell, with an insouciant wave, a brave smile, and a cheery word. And a merry Christmas on your

> repulsive rock, and a happy New Year wherever you are.

August 11, 1973, Wally wrote a letter expressing in his own inimitable manner words of appreciation for their visit with us in New Mexico.

"I sent thee late a rosy wreath entitled Mormon County, not so much honoring thee as fulfilling thy expressed and probably perverted desire to read it. Those ten beatific days while we made haste slowly!" We had named our place Festina Lente, advice we hoped we could follow, but that "slow" part was hard since Nat and I were on the go too much of the time. Wally went on to embroider our Latin name by saying, "I could quote you Catullus: Lente, lente currite, noctis equi..." adding that it translated "Run slowly, slowly, horses of the night." (Would that we had named it thus, for throughout the night freerunning horses passed our house a dozen feet from my bedroom's open window.) Would that we could have enjoyed more of Wally's and Mary's moments of insight.

Wally was to receive an award at an EDF [Environmental Defense Fund] annual dinner, held at the California Academy of Sciences. He couldn't be present and I was asked to say a few words about him. This I did, and this is what I said:

> There is an old Spanish greeting that goes, "Tell me your life and miracles." I associate this greeting with Wally Stegner who has the ability to read into the experiences of life with moments of insights, casual encounters at providential crossroads. And <u>the skill to sense these moments when they come!</u> And the world rises before one's eyes, and one sees it in all its splendor.

After Wally heard what I had said, I received a note: "You are a sketch...no, maybe a finished work. If I'd been at that dinner I'd have blushed a deep crimson and left the room coughing, and would have liked myself fine all the way."

<u>Henry Moore, 1966</u>

Owings: [written addition] It was early spring in 1966 that Nat and I were together in England and had the opportunity to share four hours with Henry Moore, the British sculptor whose powerful pieces of stone carved in massive simplicity had been introduced to

America at the Museum of Modern Art, followed by Lincoln Center and the National Gallery. I think one might call them "entrance anchors," standing in front of the glass skyscrapers.

SOM, my husband's firm, used several Henry Moore sculptures. At Lincoln Center in front of the theater was one piece, and in San Francisco a Henry Moore stands outside the Davies Symphony Hall. His sculpture was very strong, so much so that I was not prepared for Henry Moore the man.

The man who made those Herculean sculptural forms was a man of humility, speaking in a simple manner with the warm heart of a friend. He had invited us out to Much Hadham on a Sunday afternoon. He wrote out the instructions from Liverpool Street Station to Bishop's Stafford where we would arrive at 2:36. "I'll meet you," he said.

When the train stopped, there he was, and he drove us to Much Hadham with gentle words. It was a misty day and the greenness of his place shimmered with radiance. He led us around the old Tudor house and we passed a fenced garden where his wife, Irina, grew flowers and vegetables. "Rabbits," he said, as he pointed to the fence.

Then came the long view, edged with trees but with a grass-like lawn on which stood many monumental pieces of his sculpture, their surfaces moist from the weather. One sensed his loving kindness as he touched a piece or ran his hand along the arm of a reclining woman. His sculptures were his friends.

I drew Nat's attention to the shoulders and back of a woman and Moore smiled. "As a child, " he said, "I used to rub my mother's back because of the pain she had from rheumatism."

We followed him into his garden studio where my eyes were arrested by a reclining figure of a woman carved in wood, with almost the quality of driftwood, and so smooth. He pointed out a dry split in the wood, like a wound, and explained that he could never show it because of this. Nat looked embarrassed when I asked Moore why he couldn't insert wood into the split. He turned to me with surprise, and then said, "Maybe I will try to do this. I'm glad you like it."

Then we walked outside again. The mist had turned to light rain. We followed him to a very large piece cast in bronze, partially roofed with a tan canvas, not clearly defined until he began to speak about it. "I don't like to accept commissions," he said, "especially this one." It was a request for him to do a sculpture depicting the creation of the atomic bomb.

"I refused," he explained. "I felt very strongly against the bomb. But they came back again and again and asked me to do it. This time, they told me I could interpret it any way I felt. I thought about it a long time, and then I accepted the commission."

It was apparently a very large human skull burnished around the crown, about twenty feet high. It had meaningful additions where the bone structure of the face would have been. Was it the skull of man who invented the bomb? Nat and I stood shaken by it. Moore was saddened by the cruelty of man's brain.

Then, more cheerfully, he led us to a small greenhouse attached to the main house. Here is where he began small models often inspired by "found things" such as stones, shells, twisted driftwood and bones. Nat picked up a chicken bone and asked him if it related to a thin standing figure we had examined out on the grass. This was his maquette studio where forms were born in handsized shapes. I thought of some distorted shapes of old worn shells I treasured at home and told him I would send some to him.

In the main house his wife Irina had set out tea for us. She had just baked a fruitcake and it smelled marvelous. Henry explained he couldn't really indulge because he had diabetes. Nat and I exchanged quick glances as I explained that I too had diabetes but I <u>had</u> to indulge in a small piece.

We begged them to come visit with us in Big Sur and we had great fun dramatizing the setting of our house. Henry said, "Irina refuses to fly." But he promised that if he ever found himself in America he would come.

After tea, Henry took us down to the little train that left at 6:15. He helped us into our compartment, then remained standing out in the rain until, with parting waves, we were drawn away.

And when I returned home I sent him three wonderfully worn shells that had been buffeted by the storms. And this is the letter I received:

Hoglands
Perry Green
Much Hadham

4th April 1966
Dear Margaret Owings,

Thank you for sending the beautiful seashells to both me and Irina. Already one of them has given me the

idea for a piece of sculpture. At present, the idea is only the same size as the shell, but it may become a bigger piece, and if it does I will send you a photograph of it so that you will be able to recognize your part in it.

Yours sincerely,

Henry Moore

[end written addition]

XIII IMPORTANT PLACES

[Interview 6: March 17, 1987]

The Sea--Rachel Carson

Owings: This interview is as if you had asked me the question, "What special influences, would you say, shaped your life?[1] This is what I thought and wrote down.

One's life is made up of a continuity of variables, each one of different character. Some are somber, and some are deep, and others are brilliant and exuberant. And it is those that I turn back to to inspire creative qualities in me, and then I'm the happiest.

Then, if you asked me, "What places shaped your life?" I would say for places, the Pacific Ocean and the High Sierras are sort of nip and tuck. Both relate to water: the long waves breaking along the big beaches of Carmel, and the small beaches that are down the south coast; and the mountain springs, melting snow sliding over the granite.

Then you would say--[laughing] I'm sure no one's done this ever before to you--"Were there special people involved with these places?"

And so then I say, the two individuals who presented the sea the most beautifully to me were Rachel Carson and Robinson Jeffers. The Sea Around Us helped me to see my place, and my role, and as she constantly pointed out, "the perils of our future in the long view." Those lines and a few others like them that she spoke I think shaped me more than any single thing in my life.

---

[1]Mrs. Owings and the interviewer had prepared a few questions Mrs. Owings would like to answer. Throughout this interview she refers to those questions.

It was she who showed me the strength in poetic writing. At her death in 1964, Time Magazine referred to her as "...catching the life and breath of science on the still glass of poetry." Isn't that a beautiful sentence?

Riess: Yes.

Owings: I still love that because it was so right. I think many people thought of her, primarily after Silent Spring they thought of her as one who was hammering in something that they liked or didn't like, and they were angry with her. But there was so much more than that.

I was to meet her in 1963 in New York. I believe I've told you this before, that we met at the National Audubon Award formal dinner, and she was given the Audubon Award for Silent Spring. Silent Spring, of course, we all know awakened the nation. It's gone quite far since that time, but she certainly was the one that flung that door open.

I was seated at the head table beside her, because Audubon was giving me a minor citation that same evening for removing the bounty on the California mountain lion. It was very small indeed to what Rachel Carson had accomplished. Her words were so courageous, and so strong, and so beautiful, though she was in very serious pain at the time because life was coming to a close for her from cancer, and it was only a very special occasion that she went out to receive this award.

After the dinner was over, I went to her where she was resting in a soft upholstered chair in a back room, and I dropped down to her side to thank her. She thanked me and she said, "I don't know who's going to carry on my work. That's what I don't know. I don't know who's going to carry it on."

I thought to myself, "If ever I have a chance to do anything to help, I'm going to remember that," which I did. She said also, "You know, I didn't like to do this work on Silent Spring, it isn't what I wanted to do. What I wanted really, my next book I wanted to be on mysteries of the life along our shores." She had given, apparently, a lot of thought to it, and she smiled as she thought of it, and her eyes looked far away. It was a nice moment. And because of her expressed concern about who was going to carry on her work, I felt almost a personal responsibility to shoulder something after her death.

After that meeting she remembered me, and she sent me a card later to ask me where the quotation came from with which I had ended my very few words that I said after I received my award.

The theme of Audubon for giving that to me was that one person can suddenly seize a thing and push it through. So the quotation was from Laurens van der Post's line. He wrote of "...the tiny seed of the small change in the troubled individual heart. One single, lonely, inexperienced heart has to change first, and all the rest will follow." [See page 203.]

Robinson Jeffers, and Dylan Thomas

Owings: Then the other person I spoke of was Robinson Jeffers who for a period of time was almost a neighbor of mine, although I didn't ever know him well. He was a fairly formal person, drawn in within himself, and his beauty of thought and line came through his pen and his mind set apart from others when he wrote.

I was at a party at Marie Short's house in Carmel one evening when Dylan Thomas came to visit. I was a great admirer of Dylan, and so I brought him a copy of an Atlantic Monthly that had come out a few months before in which one of his poems was printed. I came over to him, and then I opened up the Atlantic Monthly. He thought for a minute I wanted him to sign it, which was not what I wanted. I wanted him to read it.

He apparently hadn't seen it printed in the Atlantic Monthly, and with his fresh face and his round eyes he looked with some astonishment at it, as if he had never seen it before. Then, in a room filled with a din of voices, he began to softly read the verse that we've all become familiar with--and I would like to quote it here:

> Now as I was young and easy under the apple boughs
> About the lilting house and happy as the grass was green
> The night above the dingle starry,
> Time let me hail and climb
> Golden in the heydays of his eyes....

Dylan Thomas especially wanted to meet Jeffers and he said, "He's here, isn't he?" He looked all around, but the room was crowded. Suddenly I saw Jeffers, and so I went over and I took his arm and took him over to Dylan. Dylan was radiant and held out his hand. Jeffers looked at him, and alas, Jeffers had drunk too much. It's a thing I don't think he did much of, until after Una died. But at any rate, it was an unfortunate time, a very unfortunate time.

I think Dylan wanted to meet Jeffers more than anyone else in the country. He tried to get an exchange with him, and to speak with him, but Jeffers didn't even seem to recognize Dylan's name, or what Dylan had done, let along what Dylan was recognizing in what Jeffers had done. Dylan radiated in his face his feelings very readily, and in this instance they were of hurt, and very somber.

The Mountains--John Muir

Owings: The next place that I spoke about was the High Sierras. They don't necessarily come second to the sea, but they're on a par. Wonderful places, the sea and the High Sierras. Something about those huge slabs of granite, with water sliding down them, coming out of springs, and then rushing into small streams, and then flattening out on granite again, and then twisting into a small waterfall, growing larger and larger.

If you follow the stream down, which I've done [on the Tuolumne River] going to Glen Aulin, and then on down from there, it is a marvelous sculptural thing in its stonework. The water where the junipers and the lodgepole pines are is perfectly beautiful, you know, because they are as beautiful when they're alive as when they've dead. The juniper's skeleton is as beautiful as the tree is in full life, sometimes more beautiful.

The clumps of wildflowers edging the streams, the shooting stars, and the lupine and paintbrush and gentian and mariposa lily! Then depending on the month of the year, whether it's the first spring month when the waters are coming out from under the snows, or whether it's the last, just as the first flakes are falling, the colors are different, and become very lavender, and duller orange at the end just before the snow falls.

The person who meant the most to me up there in those mountains was John Muir. I think I've read everything he ever wrote. And I think we have already talked fully about how I came to discover Muir, and the book I worked on using his lines, with my brush paintings.

I appreciated and took a great interest in watching for the water ouzel, which was the little being up there in the High Sierras that was John Muir's closest friend, really. In those long, long periods when he was alone he was never really alone because he had either the winds, or the water ouzel, or the sound of the water, and it filled in his life.

This made a great impression upon me because it was a time, in a sense, that I was finding my greatest solace in the out-of-doors, in things so wild and beautiful as that, rather than in people. So in a sense I absorbed a fresh philosophy from John Muir. His philosophy, of course, was one that penetrated into the values of the natural world, and almost turned its back on man's ways.

To him man was not really part of the ecology, he was almost an intruder. Whereas Aldo Leopold, writing some years later, and trying to define a conservation ethic, he includes man in the ecology, only pointing out where man is rapidly going asunder. Because Aldo Leopold certainly was very sensitive, even at that time in the thirties when he was writing those beautiful sections of his book [A Sand County Almanac], to the artificialized management that man was intruding into nature. Thinking he was bettering it, he was destroying it.

It was at the Sierra Club Wilderness Conference in 1965, which they called "Wilderness in a Changing World," that I was asked to speak a few words on the facets of wilderness. I presented it on the last day of the conference. [See appendix C for complete speech.]

[reading] These two days we've been turning over a great rough rock with many facets. It's a treasured rock. We call it "wilderness." Each facet is one variety of this wilderness, and the reflection from each facet is a human response to that experience.

There are those of us who look at wilderness primarily as a dimension--an immensity, a grand proportion--the horizon large in outline against the dark mountain range. These may be people who work by expansion and think by expansion, fanning out their interests. It's the broad, deep picture they find rewarding.

Then, there are those who turn primarily to the intimate savor of the landscape: the detail, the scent of nettle and mint, the lazy buzz of a mountain fly, the careless grace of a flower opening. These people are selective and concentrate their attention, finding their reward in infinite details.

But neither approach seeks confinement. Both pursue the sense of the unexplored landscape. For each man is his own eager explorer, as Carson said, "finding

his own particular place in this moment of time." It was Rachel Carson who unrolled the long vistas before our eyes and defined man's place as a mere moment of time.

The Trees--Quinault

Owings: Trees were always a very, very important element and pleasure in my life, and I was always rushing to defend them in some way. Even during this past year I've been defending trees in the Big Sur. It reminds me of the time when my husband Nat and I went up to the Olympic National Park and visited a forest in 1966.

The Hoh and the Quinault, the Queets and the Bogachiel. These were valleys with rich tapestry under a perpetual fall of moisture. Giant columns of Sitka spruce, hemlock, douglas fir, and red cedar reached up through red alders and big leaf maples. When an old giant comes crashing down, its life cycle does not come to a close, for it stretches out horizontally and in it seedlings take root and find their nourishment. Future taking root in the past. It was immortality through continuity.

We went on horseback and we camped under these trees in the Bogachiel with a national forest man by the name of [Fred] Overly and a national parks man. I was to find fresh cougar tracks around where we had placed our sleeping bags. The next morning I started to follow them. The national parks man was interested in my interest, but Overly always shot lions when he saw them. He told me about how he had, one time when they were very hungry, tried to eat part of the lion they had shot. It was very offensive to me.

I hurried to follow. There was a slight trail, and along this trail with the damp earth--it's damp nearly all the time up there in those forests, very damp and rich--these prints were very, very deep. I could see the scratches where the lions scratched up a bunch of leaves and urinated, leaving their trail behind. Everything was very, very clear and exciting. The park man was a little afraid I might be attacked by a lion, so he followed after me, and I kept pointing out these different tracks, and piles of scratch marks.

Anyway, Overly was simply hungry to cut the trees. The reason we had gone up there was because he had made a request, led by other people in the national forest, to make a trade with the national parks up there, so that they could get some of the finest

specimens in a whole area of the park. They would make a trade, a trade which was of no consequence. And what's more, the deepest part of this forest lay in a kind of cup of land that went up at angles. And there was a whole drainage of water into the underground springs, and the streams.

He took us around, this national forest man, to show us in the park itself. He had been told to remove from the parks any trees that were "sick." A "sick" tree to him was a tree that, god knows, was two hundred feet high and filled with foliage until it came to the point at the top which had become bare spikes. That was a "sick" tree and should come down.

Other places he would see little holes in the bark, whether they were from woodpeckers, or whatever they were from, and this was another "sick" tree he was going to have cut.

Another distressing thing that was going on was the beginning of the logs being shipped to Japan; all these trees were to be shipped to Japan. I think it's the Sitka spruce that they use in planes, you know, because they can cut it so thin. There were <u>many</u> things that were very distressing.

Riess: When was it that you went to the Quinault?

Owings: That was in 1966.

Riess: After your trip to Africa?

Owings: Yes, I guess it was.

Riess: You have written about the sheer thrill of being in a place where you were undefended against the animals.

Owings: Yes, in Shimba Hills we camped among trees, and we were allowed at that time to walk freely, but always with our guide. He carried a gun which he never fired.

During the years that he had been a guide he had never ever fired that gun. He had been born in Africa, but sent to England to school, and then brought back. When he started first going out with hunting groups he was appalled at what they were doing. Then he became a guide for people who wanted to see the animals, and respect them, and photograph them, and so on.

But it was in Shimba Hills that I got lost in a forest, and it was interesting to have that sense--it was almost "fear clutched my heart." One reads about people getting lost in these solid forests, with very high trees that shut out all the light,

or where a tree has fallen, and suddenly you see far ahead a brilliant light.

I kept thinking that Eric, our guide at the time, had gone on, and that he was in the light, or maybe that he was out the other side of the forest, and I rushed through it, knowing full well that they had lots of leopards in there. I would get there, and it was simply where a tree had fallen, so I would climb up on top of the fallen tree and sit there for a while. [laughs]

Riess: You talked about being on the track of the cougar in the Quinault, and I wondered about the excitement and sense of danger when you're in a place where a mountain lion is?

Owings: I had no real fear about the cougars, even though we know there have been recent incidents and so on. So there was nothing that worried me that way.

Riess: But I interrupted you. We were talking about the trees.

Owings: I was talking about this national forest man, Overly, who told us about the time he had been called to Washington to be interviewed by Newton Drury, who was at that point head of the National Park Service.

This so-called "salvage operation" up there probably involved national forest people in national parks lands. That is why he was reporting to the National Park Service head. This man had one good point to him, and that is he had an enormous sense of humor, and my husband had an enormous sense of humor, and they could play at one another, hurling insults at one another, but always with a humorous twist.

When Overly went to Washington, he had with him a bag of sawdust. He knew he was up for a reprimand about cutting trees, and before he went in to see Newton he put sawdust--he had his trousers turned up at the bottom, a little cuff--he put sawdust in the cuffs, and he put sawdust in his pocket up here where he had a handkerchief sticking out, and he put sawdust in his pockets on either side. When he came in to greet Newton he left sawdust tracks along the carpet as he approached the desk. And when he leaned over to shake Newton's hand he grabbed his handkerchief out of his pocket and the sawdust fell down the front of his coat. [laughter] That man could get by with murder sometimes! But Newton, after that, was much more strict about the preservation of these old forests.

The morning we returned along the trail, some two miles before we reached the outside park boundary, we heard through that

wonderful, wonderful silence, a warning of the outside world, the nasal screaming of the mechanical saw on adjacent national forest lands. Somehow we had thought this park was a sanctuary, and we had thought it was imperishable, but this ugly noise was called progress. One can guess how Nat and I reacted.

And More Thoughts on the Redwood Forests

Owings: Trees again--I just spoke of Newton Drury. Newton Drury and his brother Aubrey Drury played a very, very important role in the redwoods up in northern California in Humboldt County and Mendocino County. They were the two who started concentrated work on saving the redwoods. The redwood groves and the coast redwoods, Sequoia sempervirens and Sequoia gigantea, were the two great trees almost in the world. There was a little French girl who wrote a few poems and little articles when she was very, very young. From them I picked out a line that said, "If there is a god, it was a forest which invented him."

My father was to introduce us, my brother and myself, to the redwoods, and over the years when he served on the board of Save-the-Redwoods League, and later, after he had died, I fought the battle against the intrusion of a broad highway being cut through the finest redwood groves that were growing in the alluvial flats. I was glad to be able to do this because his spirit was behind me, and I was sorry that he was no longer alive because I had put in easily two-and-a-half years on this particular work.

For example, in Jedediah Smith Redwood State Park on the north coast a national tribute grove was established in 1947. It was established as a living memorial to the dead of World War II. The funds were raised by some four thousand donors--Save-the-Redwoods League, and the Garden Clubs of America--for what was described as "a fitting and imperishable tribute."

> [reading] Yet the California State Highway Department, relying on what they called "the user benefit ratio," felt obliged to route a highway that will remove eighty acres of prime redwoods out of a hundred and forty acre parcel of this land. This cut would pass through the summit of the terrain with a cut a hundred and twenty feet deep and seven hundred feet wide. It would destroy the portal openings into the inner chamber, one might say. It would destroy the sequence of the native environment, the life zone with its water storage, its light and shadow, and

> windthrow and sun scald would gradually reach in and remove the bordering forests. This was in public park lands, and one might ask, is public park land a freedom, or shouldn't it be a discipline? A discipline for protection. [Taken from a speech, "The California Dilemma: Is Conservation a Freedom or a Discipline?" delivered at the National Audubon Convention in Sacramento, California, Nov. 14, 1966.]

When Ronald Reagan became governor he was shown an inventory of park lands, and he made the determination that "land that is not being used ought to be put on the market and sold." I had thought of that land as a land bank, and when I was first on the park commission it was an era of acquisition for this land, not necessarily rushing people into using it. We had centuries ahead for that purpose.

The escalation of land values was already beginning on the upward climb, and with the destruction of the scenic areas for housing and industry, networks of freeways, there was little choice left for prime park lands. Freya Stark--as you know one of my very favorite authors--wrote, "Can beauty walk along the edge of opposites?" I took that line out, and one time when I had the board of the State Park Commission for lunch here and we were discussing this subject, I read some of Freya Stark to them. They were quite astonished, naturally, that I should select these passages to read to them.

The Southwest--Alcalde, 1939

Owings: [referring to prepared notes] I've spoken now of the sea and the mountains, and trees. The fourth thing that I've loved has been going to the Southwest.

I went out to New Mexico with my former husband Mac soon after my marriage. I believe we went out there in 1939. I didn't expect to fall in love with the adobe and the dry barrancas, and the fact that the earth and the houses that I saw were made of adobe, and that the earth around the walls of the houses was adobe, the same earth that the adobe houses were made out of. I just fell in love with it.

One of the first nights we were there we were on Canyon Road in Santa Fe, where a series of little shops and houses were stretched along the road. Cement had not been used on any of them; they were all adobe. I was taken into one which was

absolutely superb. It excited me so. It was all mud. It was mud on the outside; you went in, and it was mud on the inside. The walls were mud, but the furnishings were absolutely elegant. Crystal chandeliers, I remember, and beautiful, delicate, mahogany pieces of furniture, and the dining table all shiny. But set in this setting of the mud house. I was startled by it, and intrigued by it, and never forgot it, and wanted to do something like it myself someday, which in a sense I tried to do when I finally moved out there to live.

Santa Fe left an indelible impression on me. We spent a number of weeks with Florence Bartlett at Alcalde. (Florence Bartlett was the woman who established the folk art museum in Santa Fe.) We used to ride each day on horseback off into the barrancas, and through the juniper, and sometimes along the river. We would take picnics.

We met Mary Wheelwright, another remarkable woman from Boston, who was about to found the Wheelwright Museum. Her prime interest was the Indians themselves, and the Navahos in particular. She had a great friend in a Navaho medicine man. She took him back to Boston with her. He had long braids. Mary Wheelwright was a character, but an aristocrat at the same time. There was nothing unaristocratic about her. She would tell the most fantastic tales of things she had done. She was a tall, thin woman.

She had a house out there that was very attractive, two stories. Mac and I went through it, and she gave us lunch. In the back she had some Lhasas, like Pekingese, little Lhasa dogs. She raised them. I took one look at them and thought, "That's what I want in my life." So I chose one. She said, "You've chosen exactly the one that isn't the purebred." It was between a Pekingese and a Lhasa. I thought life was happy now, but when I returned home to Ravinoaks I found I couldn't have it because we were living with Mac's family and we didn't have dogs in the house or outside the house at that point. But I remember Alcalde for that.

I also remember riding up under the big cottonwood trees past the Garlands' house. The Garlands' house was almost a mansion, a wonderful mud mansion. It had enormous cottonwood trees filled with peacocks. As we would ride under they would be screeching at one another.

The whole thing had an atmosphere that just left an indelible impression upon me, and I knew I wanted to come back there sometime. This area was all about thirty or forty miles from

Santa Fe. Mac and I talked about living out there, and wouldn't it be fun to own one of these adobe houses.

We drove all around and went down a river road and found high adobe walls and some broken down adobes, but mostly these high adobe walls that you couldn't see beyond. Between the adobe wall and the dirt road grass always grew, and so there were always cattle grazing there. All along the roads cattle and horses were grazing. Some of the cattle even had bells on them, and that gave me the same thrill that I had in the Austrian Alps. There was one place, one corner, called Jacona, with mail boxes in the center, and I thought, "This is where I want to live." There was no place for us to live there then, no place, but I didn't forget it.

Mac and I had lived in Carmel for a number of years, but after my divorce I took Wendy and packed up and went to New Mexico. Jacona is where I met my future husband, Nat Owings. It was such an amazing coincidence that Nat owned the piece of property at the corner where the mailboxes were lined up, the precise spot where I had dreamed of living more than a dozen years before. Here, we built our compound of adobe houses and here those marvelous cottonwood trees were such a joy. So it was a circle that came around and met itself, which is quite unusual, I think.

Riess: Santa Fe in 1939 was an artist's community, wasn't it?

Owings: Yes.

Riess: Was that very appealing to you then?

Owings: Yes, and along Canyon Road was where most of the artist's studios were.

Riess: Did you respond artistically? Did you paint in that period as a response to that place?

Owings: I did some, but not a lot. I sort of absorbed things then. But later when I went out there I had a studio, and I worked continually at art. I had shows in Santa Fe, and then I brought my things back to San Francisco and had shows in San Francisco and Carmel and all around.

Riess: You said that when you had gone back to Chicago after first coming to Big Sur you worked on a novel of the Big Sur area. Was there an equivalent response to Santa Fe?

Owings: Well, I began to write, and I wrote poetry. One could just sit out there and be a poet, that's all. Or one could just sit out

there and be a painter, like Georgia O'Keeffe, and it was a great pleasure and privilege for me to meet her and to feel that I knew her.

Riess: How were you introduced to people in Santa Fe?

Owings: Through Florence Bartlett. She was a Chicago woman, a spinster who had gone out to New Mexico because she had heard about a ranch--I don't think they called Alcalde a dude ranch.

Alcalde was very beautiful. It was in a primitive village that was specially active with the Penitentes at Easter time. There was a Penitente church and graveyard right beside one of the high walls of the ranch, and I used to sit up on the wall and watch the people there. Nat and I later used to go up there at Easter time to watch the people and the ceremonies they went through. Very, very earnest, and very, very serious. Out of doors.

This ranch at Alcalde where Mac and I stayed had been founded by a young woman who came from Boston who was studying to be a concert pianist. She was sent out by her family, the first time ever sent out alone, to Los Angeles where some particularly well-known teacher lived, himself a concert pianist. It had all been arranged very, very carefully. She went out on the train, and when the train stopped at Lamy she looked out the window, and she saw a cowboy.

There were lots of people around, but the cowboy was unduly handsome, just very, very handsome, with his cowboy hat on and a beautiful, wonderful face, strength in his face, and he strutted around in his boots and was helping people do things. She gave him one look, and she rushed to the conductor and said, "I want my bags taken off." She poured off the train--it only stops for a few minutes in Lamy--and they were able to get her trunks out of the baggage car, and then the train pulled away and there she was. [laughing]

The cowboy, in the meantime, had gone off with some other people, but she watched him as closely as she could. She knew nothing about the Southwest, but found that you could ride by bus to Santa Fe. So she had everything put on the bus for Santa Fe, and she got off there. She was a very attractive little person with big, blue eyes, just solid blue, blue of the sky, and a quick, quick mind, and sort of a turned-up nose, and lots of fun. By inquiring around she found the name of this cowboy, and then she found him. And that was <u>it</u> in her life. That was it.

In the end they were married out there. She bought part of this village in Alcalde. (The word means a place where the government of an area has its buildings.) Everything, of course, was in mud, and she bought it, all in its muddy state, and put it together with the help of this man.

He was a great horseman, he collected horses. And she made it into a perfectly beautiful place. Then she decided to have it as a guest ranch because she had used up all her money [laughs] and she had to have someone come in and pay. So this became well-known around the Chicago circle of Lake Forest as a place that you could go that was wonderful. She had a great sense of flowers, and always there were great bowls of flowers, and great bowls of fruit out on the walkways. And she collected a very interesting group of people.

At any rate, Florence Bartlett went out there to stay. When she met this delightful little woman who was getting down in funds, Florence bought her a wonderful grand piano--she had had just some little upright piano--so that she could get back to her music again. That was brought in, and a great big building made just for that. Then Florence asked if she could build a house on the property, and that was agreed upon.

Later, Florence decided she loved it so much there that she wanted to move out from Chicago--she had been brought up on Prairie Avenue on the south side of the city in one of those enormous houses, and she would tell me about that and what she did as a child. She bought the whole ranch and she was very happy out there, although she didn't like the Penitentes because she was a Christian Scientist and she didn't like anything negative--we had to be awfully positive when we were with her.

This delightful little woman then moved up the river--properties all went down to the river--moved up the river further to a smaller place, with her grand piano and her marvelous collection of Navaho rugs. She was a woman of exquisite taste that seemed to blend right in with the Southwest, as if she had been born for it. She took tremendous interest in Indian rugs and developed a marvelous collection of them, and could talk about them. We would go to her house and she would talk about where she got them, and what the people were like when she got them, and how the dyes were made, and so forth and so on.

Florence lived at the ranch itself, and only had her friends come. She had friends like the Stokowskis, the musicians. She nearly always had some prominent people. We just sort of came in under the line of things. But it was a pleasure being there. [end of prepared section]

The Porch--Cliffside Seat

Owings: [This passage comes from the first meeting of Owings and Riess.] Can I read you something I just wrote? We get out the Otter Raft for Friends of the Sea Otter, and I usually write what I call the "Cliffside Seat," which I thought of as a term which would be a sort of broader view, not entering totally into our problems except as hints of our problems.

> [reading] From my cliffside seat I watch the wave gradually take shape down the long ribbon of coastline under a clear dawn. Born out of elongated shadows, it moves towards shore. Driven by the winds and that mysterious lunar power, it meets an undertow, draws back, then arcs over it to explode on the shore with a crash of white radiance. At that moment the words of Gavin Maxwell are flung out: "The morning is like the childhood of life when the blood sings and it is easy to laugh."
>
> [reading] I tend to think of Friends of the Sea Otter as finding its symbol in the wave, which lifts and falls, gathering momentum, despite crosscurrents, despite manmade intrusions and spillage, despite some unwelcome shores. We, in our struggle to guard the southern sea otter, moved toward our goal like the waves, despite mortalities from shooting, drowning in gill nets in heavy storms during which young pups are wrenched from their mother's clasp and washed away.
>
> We reach the shore through an almost intuitive route, truly caring for these small sea mammals and their vital role in the near-shore community. But our work is an endless series of waves as the tides ebb and flow, mixing realism with idealism, science with emotional response. As George Schaller describes it, "We seek the moral values in what we do, an obligation to fight for preservation, to struggle to the best of our ability, to assure ourselves, as well as the million inarticulate lives, a future."

Riess: You have found a voice for talking about things that you care about. Has this been your voice for a long time, this kind of poetic approach?

Owings: I tend to always do this kind of thing. I hate to do it with just facts and numbers, dry facts I mean. My whole inclination, as with most of my "Cliffside Seats," has been to get some kind of a

mental picture for the reader, and then read into it something that I'm trying to say. I never begin with all these other things, you know, that we have in here. Some of them are humdingers and we have a lot of things that make us furious.

Riess: You don't start with a call to arms, in other words? It's more like an invocation.

Owings: Sometimes I end with a call to arms. But I do that less. [See appendix D for more selections from The Otter Raft.]

I wrote something about Dian Fossey. She went up to the Rurunga Mountains to study the gorilla just when we started Friends of the Sea Otter. These were both animals that were endangered. That is high, almost 12,000 feet, you know, and we are at sea level, so our methods were quite different, but we both found and faced similar things with the gorilla and the otter, and I listed them.

Riess: Has the writing been easy?

Owings: No, my writing isn't easy, although sometimes it pours out easily, and then other times it's very hard. I mean, I work over and over and over to polish it or to cut out. I like to think always of a telegram. I'm trying to say something as short as a telegram, but to get the essence into it.

That's the trouble with most of the people who write for us here. At the beginning, they all want to write everything under the sun, you know, and then say it three times, and then at the bottom is where the message is, really, for the reader, way at the bottom, and people have turned away from it by that time. The construction of the writing is terribly important when you have an audience of people who receive these things.

I thought, almost as a beginning for a thing of this sort [oral history], of speaking about an old piece of wood, Japanese wood, that you may have noticed at the front door. It's sometimes called a rama or sometimes it's just a sign for a tea house. I got Noguchi, the Japanese sculptor who stayed here, to translate it for me. (I had put it up there without knowing what it said.) He looked at it and he said, "Part of this is gone, it's been cut partially, but what this says is 'evening change.'" I was intrigued by that.

Then I had Alan Watts here. He used to come here a lot. They had classes here. So I had Alan translate it. I didn't tell him what Noguchi had said. He studied it for a while and he

fumbled around with the words, and then he said, "Well, really it says 'evening change.'"

The last one who saw it was a Japanese businessman brought over from Japan for a trip. He wanted to see this house. He really wanted to see if our john was just open--he'd heard about our john. He asked if he could see the bathroom and so on. Then I asked him to look at that sign. He studied it for a while. He told me there was something cut off of it. Then he said, "Well, this says 'evening,' and this really says 'change.'" Isn't that interesting?

Riess: Yes.

Owings: I've thought of it really as my life now, in a way, because in my life now I'm looking back. As the light changes in the evening some of the things become diffused in your mind and some things are clarified or brought back, and that's really what in a sense one might say I'm trying to do.

And Peregrine Falcons, and Orcas

Owings: Our south porch which hangs out over the world below is really an invitation to keep one's eye on the world around one while one is sitting doing other things. When I was working on my stitchery I often sat there and enjoyed the intimacy of my work while sensing the sea below and the Peregrine falcons circling at eye level around the house, dropping suddenly to catch a bird on the wing, or mounting higher to attack a red-tailed hawk.

A few research members of the Predatory Bird Group at the University of California at Santa Cruz first came to us some years ago to tell us that we had a Peregrine nest on our point. I asked them why Peregrines would have chosen our precipitous cliff for a nest. They told me it was "a perfect hacking site." One young man said, "If I was a falcon I would choose your point above all others"--its steep silhouette reaches out into the sea. "It's a natural," he said, and I was flattered.

So it was that Grimes Point became a part of the effort to reestablish the Peregrine falcon along the California coast. There are only eleven hack sites between Morro Rock and Santa Cruz due to the DDT and DDE still carried in the eggs causing them to break easily and fail to hatch.

This last spring our Peregrines laid three eggs, and one was broken, one cracked, and the third, whole. The team took the good egg and they replaced the eggs with false eggs for the birds to brood. And a few weeks later they returned with a young fledgling in a box that had been all fluffed up with cotton, and they placed the box on our dining table. I was allowed to feed the young bird, using a peregrine puppet to hold the piece of quail meat, while the others prepared for the trip over the cliff.

I watched from above as the young men and women climbed down. Suddenly, as they approached the hack site, the female parent flew off the ledge with a terrified cry, calling the mate. The fledgling was left in the nest with some quail meat and the young people, using ropes, made their precarious way back up the cliff. We all waited to watch the parents return to the nest again, which they soon did.

In a relatively short time that young bird was raucously flapping around the house. It was so awkward and immature that it flew right over my head and into the house, knocking its body against the north window and falling to the floor. I gathered it up, holding its wings against its body, and brought it out to the porch and gradually released it. The team told me that this fledgling had come from an egg laid at Bixby Canyon, one of the few healthy eggs laid among the eleven Peregrine hack sites that year.

For many years we had a powerful old navy telescope, and one morning when I looked down at the sea lions and noted about eighty of them on the beach and others drifting near shore, I suddenly sensed a tension among the animals. Something was frightening them. Those in the water barked sharply in alarm.

Around the bend into the cove a dozen killer whales, orcas, were moving rapidly in pairs toward the sea lions. The leader was a mammoth animal with a bite notched out of the curve of its high fin.

Beached sea lions, hearing the alarm from those in the water, and apparently unaware of its cause, poured into the water with a great rumble and joined the swimming herd. They formed a mass of heads, in a solid circle, all faces turned intently towards the approaching orcas. The handsome orcas divided their formation of pairs and encircled the sea lions. Actually they were moving like dressage at a horse show, so precise.

Then abruptly, as if a whistle had blown, the orcas arched their bodies and dove under the sea lions, who in turn instantly withdrew beneath the surface. The water was almost calm for a

minute or two, nothing was discernable, and then the orcas reappeared, cutting the quiet surface. They regained their formation, some still devouring sea lions, and the leader with the notch in its high fin led the pod south. (I could recognize it through the glass over a mile down the coast.)

A strange silence prevailed. Some sea lions crawled up on the beach. One could see gashes in their sides. Others turned north in the water and swam up the coast away from the orcas. The beach was nearly empty for several days.

XIV MORE PEOPLE AND PLACES AND ORGANIZATIONS

Stewart Udall

Lage: Throughout the oral history you have been discussing issues and the very important people you were allied with or worked with or came to know. There are a few more I know you want to mention, and I thought we might spend some time on that.

You worked with Stewart Udall. Did you work with him at all on the redwoods?

Owings: Yes, but not on the national park grove because my work was mostly on what the California Division of Highways was going to do, just the unbelievable things they were doing. They are still doing quite a bit.

He came and stayed with us out in New Mexico at our place.

I always remember one time when there was a discussion about Blue Lake, which is above Taos. It is a sacred lake that the Taos Indians didn't want anyone around, and it is understandable. There came a time when people saw it because they flew over it, and they could look down on it, which was an offense. Nevertheless, they would do it.

The Forest Service wanted to take it over, but they wanted to have a development on it. Clinton Anderson [U.S. senator, New Mexico] was in favor of this. So there was an interesting exchange between a man who was Secretary of the Interior, Udall, and a strong legislator, because Anderson was a very strong legislator. Udall didn't feel he could say things. We talked a lot at home about it, Udall and I.

When we had lunch with Clinton Anderson I brought it up, which Udall wasn't going to do. I said, "Of course, you are going to respect that this means so much to the Indians, and there is no reason to intrude upon it. There is no reason for it to be taken

over by the Forest Service where it could be multiple use the next minute, or something like that." (They had talked about having a development up there because it was a beautiful lake. It was apparently very blue.)

Anderson never forgot. Years later he remembered by bringing it up. But we got it. He responded. It was only then that Udall expressed himself, but very cautiously, very, very cautiously. I didn't have to hold back, because I was just a stupid woman.

Being a Woman in Conservation Politics

Lage: I've heard many women, mainly in conservation because those are women I interview, who had trouble initially being strong about expressing an opinion and speaking in public, especially at hearings. Was that ever a problem for you?

Owings: Yes, yes, especially at the beginning. But it became less so when I served on the State Park Commission. I liked to have notes clutched in my hand (even if I didn't look at them). Other times, you had to send in copies of what you were going to say to the members of a board or committee. Then I didn't mind if after that they began to ask me questions; I was perfectly relaxed about that because I had broken the ice in the beginning.

Lage: What about bringing up things with a congressman? Was it difficult to assert yourself? Or did it just come naturally?

Owings: No, that didn't trouble me at all, because I usually felt so strongly over an issue.

Our executive director of Friends of the Sea Otter, Carol Fulton, developed the highest art of that, just absolutely superb --sometimes perhaps just a little too strong. Of course, one can go "a little too strong" when one is hurling oneself into some point, and then it can cut the wrong way. If they ask her a question, she can come back with an answer so quickly, so forcefully, she became known as an achiever.

Yes, Carol is very rare! She had a baby boy since she married Bill Yeates. They had to remodel her house in Pacific Grove because Bill already had a little boy, and they were limited in space. This gave Carol an office with a huge horseshoe desk, and with all kinds of office equipment and papers and everything all over the place. She was in the middle of all this with a baby

on her back, or leaning over talking on the phone, her hand searching through papers as her baby begins to whimper.

Lage: You have mentioned several times, as we have talked, about people thinking, "She's just a little woman." Did you see yourself being identified in that way?

Owings: Well, if I said that I certainly wasn't referring to Carol, if I made that remark, far from it. And as for myself, I was referred to in that way down at the North American Wildlife Conference [pp. 112-116]--only more so!

I'm not a person who is sensitive about the woman role, as some women are, because I was always too busy to be that. I didn't mean that I was being put down as a woman, but that I didn't want to be identified as having only an emotional appeal. I wanted to be practical and accurate.

Lage: Whatever stereotypes there may have been about women, you didn't want to let them pin them on you?

Owings: That never bothered me, although every so often I lost out on something because I was a woman, but that's not too important to me. I nearly always was on a board where I was the only woman, and some men didn't like it, but it didn't bother me.

Jane Goodall

Owings: Do you want me to talk about Jane Goodall?

Lage: I'd love to hear about her.

Owings: I had met Louis Leakey. We had gone to the Olduvai Gorge, Tanganyika, the first time we were in Africa. Later, friends established the Leakey Foundation and Nat and I went down to Los Angeles for a dinner and meeting. I was seated beside Dr. Leakey. He was so warm and responsive. Naturally, I talked about my own interests. He, in turn, was so interested in what I was doing. A marvelous man, I was much impressed by him. I could see how he started Jane Goodall in the direction of the chimps at Gombe.

When Jane went there, she was from England and had no real connection with wildlife, but she was ready for something.

Lage: What was her background?

Owings: Her background, as I understand it, was just a simple background with general education of a young woman. She had a very nice mother who accompanied her in starting up the study camp in Gombe.

There is a woman by the name of Tita Caldwell who became a leader in the Leakey Foundation. I met Tita someplace and enjoyed her right away. She called me to tell me that Jane was coming to California and wanted to see the sea otters. She wanted to see an animal that was using its claws as tools, as chimps did. They came up here and we had a truly happy time. Jane was married to Hugo Van Lawick, who is a baron, a charming guy.

We had them with us for several days, and we walked through the redwoods. They were so impressed. We took them out in Monterey Bay in boats and around rafting otters.

Jane was thrilled to watch an otter using a stone in its paws to crack a sea urchin! But she was terribly perturbed about seeing what we almost get used to seeing, and that is the plastic circle from soda and beer six-packs that the sea lions get around their necks when they are smaller, and then as they grow larger they are choked by them. There was this big sea lion up on a rock at the Coast Guard breakwater being choked by one of these plastic circles. Jane wanted to get right off the boat and do something about it. I would have wanted to too, but it's not as simple as it might appear, and we had quite a party with us. We had to pass by.

When they came back here they talked about the wild dogs they had photographed and recently made into a film. It was great, and movingly presented. The film was shown on a large screen. I had invited about thirty people for dinner. Jane sat on the big rock beside the fireplace, and the fire was burning. Hugo was making comments as Jane related the story.

They had beautiful exchanges between themselves about these dogs that they had named--they would always name the animals, whether they were the dogs or the chimpanzees, hyenas too, whatever animals they grew to think of personally. I understand that. Some of the people, some scientists, have been critical of it. I don't see any reason to be critical of it at all because it becomes a descriptive thing. One recognizes the individuals.

I read to them my "Nerve Song" the next evening. They both responded so well to it that I was pleased. Jane wrote me several letters wanting me to be sure to get it published. She said, "Hugo must take photographs for it." Hugo said, "It says enough in itself; it doesn't need photographs." I appreciated the fact

that he said that. Anyway, the last letter I had from her said, "Have you had it published?"

Lage: Have you made any effort to have it published?

Owings: Hardly. I sent it to Audubon Magazine. I thought surely they were going to do it. I made a painting of a vulturine guinea fowl feather, the feather I picked up after the hawk attacked the birds. It became the symbol of my "Nerve Song." It was the only illustration I thought I needed. [See following page.] But Les Line of Audubon, turned it down.

After that I didn't have anyone to give me a shove. I didn't do anything about it, although I have a publisher who is interested in it, in Vermont. I thought Jane Goodall could write the introduction, and maybe it would be a slim book. Wallace Stegner went over it with me when we were in the West Indies together, and he made some corrections that were good--always very subtle, careful not to hurt or offend in any way. So I have a number of people's advice.

At any rate, Jane wrote me about the chimp, Flo and Flo's son, Flint. When Flo died, Jane was terribly upset. Then the tragedy that followed was the death of young Flint because he was so depressed and lost without his mother, so sad. She wrote these incidents to me in several letters. The chimps were her family and she felt bereft. I haven't seen her for a long, long time.

Jane and Hugo had a son. They called him "Grub." In Swahili it means bush baby. She called him Grublin. Because we had recently been in Africa, we had much to talk about. She is just one of the people whom I loved and missed but have rarely seen again.

Evelyn and Amyas Ames, and the 1965 Trip to Africa

Owings: I want to talk about Evelyn and Amyas Ames. They came here to the house at the suggestion of Jean Burden, who is a poetess in southern California, and Eric Barker, who is a poet here in Big Sur. I don't know whether you know his work, but it is lovely. He is no longer alive.

I thought, well, here are some people coming, and I have a lot to do. I wasn't prepared for the impact I was going to have when they came in, the loveliness of those two people. Oh, they

An Excerpt from Nerve Song, by Margaret W. Owings

The sky is turning copper now on the Uaso Nyiro River, sharpening a silhouette of two vultures hunched on a bare limb. A covey of vulturine guinea fowl sift out of the undergrowth near the water's edge. Once again, an order predictable in its ritual takes place. The approach to the river for a few at a time to drink, the watchful waiting for each to take a turn, holding their heads like embellished crooks inset with burning ruby eyes. A luminous blue, taffy-brown and slate gray, sweep up the bank and are propelled forward again for the intuitive procedure.

A hawk is wheeling overhead. Circling a tree, he reappears suddenly at an acute angle, dropping among the guinea fowl like an explosion. Out of the confusion, only the hawk remains; stretching his wings, he rises slowly up through the narrow corridor of the river.

On the earth lies a feather.

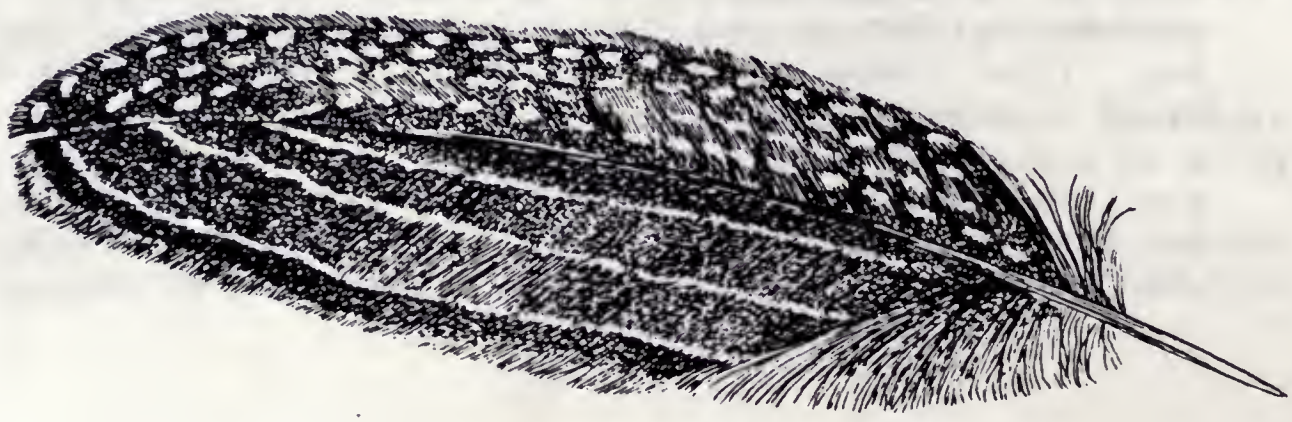
I slip off the tree trunk to claim it. Eight inches of exquisite understatement--warm in charcoal-brown, pierced by a white quill with opposing elements of design on either side. Is it the symbol of life in Africa, these opposites paralleling one another?

Three steady, delicate lines march up the quill on the left: birth, life, death. While on the right, the staccato pulse of life, uneven, nervous and varied lies in four rows of dots.

So here is the rhythmic harmony, but, as this fallen feather indicates, without a guarantee. Give one the guarantee and vitality stagnates. The nerve song of Africa, found in this unexpected pattern, hidden beneath the vestments of the handsome vulturine guinea fowl, will be the tangible record of this journey I shall take home.

Turning it in my fingers, I too must accept the opposites in the rhythm as a part of the full harmony. I too must not ask for the guarantee. I look upon the feather with fresh insight.

Is it my life?



were just great, such quality and fineness in their taste and comments. Evie speaks so exquisitely. He is quieter.

Lage: Where are they from?

Owings: From New York.

Have you ever read Glimpse of Eden? Evie wrote that about the trip that we went on together. And every time Amie went anyplace, he always did a little book. [Shows book of photographs from a visit to the Owings home in New Mexico.]

The day that they came here, it was one of those absolutely clear days. You could see every headland for fifty miles away. They fell in love with the location here and wanted to come back.

Also that day I saw the bracelet Evie had of stones set with gold clips on them. Amyas had found and polished the stones and made them into a bracelet for her. So we immediately began talking about stones. I remember that as our first conversation. As a child I had gone to Europe with a rather small suitcase--as I think of it now--which kept getting heavier and heavier. My father said, finally,"What have you got in this?" We were in Europe for six weeks, and wherever I went I picked up stones, and filled my suitcase. You could hardly lift it up. I told Evie and Amie that, and somehow we had a great many bonds in common.

Evie has done a book of poetry called "Dust on the Precipice," which is exquisite. Amie would often take a photograph, and she would write poetry. He did marvelous pictures of our whole African trip.

Lage: Did he publish his photographs?

Owings: Not the African trip, but yes, he did one on Martha's Vineyard about the rabbits and other animals. He had little, quaint things to say about them. He is a man of great prestige. He was head of Lincoln Center and of the New York Philharmonic.

The two of them had traveled with Leonard Bernstein through Europe. Evie was able, although it might be almost the same concert they would give whether it was in Vienna or whether it was in Israel, to describe the way the place was, the response of the people, the way certain sounds seemed to come out. She would describe these differences in the concerts in the most extraordinary way--but that was Evie.

Paul Brooks, who was a friend of mine and, I guess, a friend of theirs too, had written an article that came out in Heritage

magazine about a trip in Africa in which he had this guide, Bob Lowis. I read about him aloud to Nat one time--Nat was always on the fly, always going someplace--I said, "I'm going to read this aloud to you." So I read it, and I said, "Let's go." He was so surprised. He hadn't thought of ever going to Africa. I said that I thought we ought to go with someone. I suggested the Ameses, whom he had never met. I just told him how wonderful they were.

I telegraphed the Ameses and asked them if they wanted to go to Africa with us. They were so astonished by that telegram. They never thought of going to Africa. Then we exchanged letters. They said, "Yes."

There came a time during our trip when we were following a herd of cape buffalo. We were not on any roads or anything. Bob was driving along, and we were going through some bushes. There was very tall grass, and suddenly here right in front of us was a big rhinoceros. I remember Bob was always so calm about everything, but there was just a note of uneasiness on his part then. He said, "I like it better when this grass isn't this tall because you can see ahead," but we tore through it and passed this rhino. They are very dangerous, and they attack cars. Our car was sort of open.

We came to a donga, which is a dugout place, like a big trench. Bob said, "Can we make it?" We all poured out of the car quickly to look. I, being cautious said, "I don't think we can." Nat, who was never cautious, said, "Oh yes, we can."

Evie and I stood on the side together and watched the men, who had never moved so fast, pull trees down and push them under the wheels. We went down in the donga and got stuck; we were just there, almost even with the ground itself. Evie and I both heard breathing, heavy breathing. Evie said, "Do you hear that breathing?" I said [whispering], "Yes, I do." Then we took our binoculars and looked and right ahead of us, not much farther than the length of this room, were two big rhinos.

Evie said, "I'm going to frame it." I, looking through the glasses which brought them right up about like this, said, "What are you going to frame?" She said, "Your letter, asking us to come." [laughter]

Lage: You made it out of that situation?

Owings: We did. The men got enough stuff under the wheels, and then Bob jumped in the car, and the car obviously couldn't do it, but it

did it. Once in a while a thing is just done. We got out, and we just whizzed by the two rhinos. That was a relief.

Lage: When was that trip?

Owings: That was in 1965.

One of Evie's dear friends was Anne Lindbergh. The Lindberghs had just returned from Africa. Nat and I got involved with trying to save something. Charles Lindbergh wanted to save an area called Shimba Hills, which means lion country, outside Mombasa. Nat picked him up on it and ran with the ball, as you might say.

His idea was we would make it a place where tourists getting off the boat at Mombasa could be put in a bus and taken to this extraordinary woods in the Shimba Hills. They are so dense, and no paths run through it at all because that's where the natives ran to hide when people came to take slaves. The trees were just beside one another, just incredible. The bird life and everything was so wonderful. Nat and I didn't go to see it with the Ameses. We went another time.

Nat offered to design and build for them a reception place. It was going to be like an amphitheater, and we picked out the only trees we were going to have taken out. The walkway would have been over damp ground that goes down into this. There was to be a big grass roof, where batteries could be put in, and they could show some pictures and talk to the people. We designed it on the porch here.

Afterwards the government changed, and Jomo Kenyatta's wife was feeling that the country needed the money, not only from leopard skins but charcoal. They began to cut and burn in there. We heard then that they had cut through the very area that we marked for the amphitheater. They hadn't gotten to the heart of this massive forest. It's even more impressive than the rain forest that you see on television today, because it was so old and untouched except for the little footprints long ago. We had snakes and all kinds of things around us.

Anyway, we joined together with the Ameses in 1965 for that trip, and after Evie returned home she wrote Glimpse of Eden. That is a thing unto itself because it is not just describing this animal or that animal. It's what happens to the human psyche and the human spirit. For the first time in my life I realized what the balance of nature meant, because we were part of that balance.

With Bob Lowis we did a great deal of walking instead of just all closed up in cars, which they later did. We could walk with Bob, and Bob seemed to be able to hear anything. He always carried a rifle, but never shot it. Once in a while we would hear his bullet go down into the gun, but nothing occurred. We had no bad incidents, other than when Evie made that remark about "framing it."

It was a glorious time. We spent ten days on the Mara River. We were the only people there. Now there are lodges, everything under the sun there. The first night I wondered what all the dogs were barking about. Bob explained that those were zebra. He said, "It's good, that means there are lots of lions." When a lot of zebra are together, they sound like barking dogs.

We had our worries about lions and things. Evie and I would sort of hold hands every once in a while. Evie thought at one time that someone had pushed against the little tent. They were such thin little tents, and here we were out in no-man's land.

Lage: Did this affect your involvement with wildlife? Or were you already on this track?

Owings: I was always interested. Yes. We found a magazine in Africa that told about me and the mountain lion bounty. Isn't that unbelievable? I had already begun that. The sea lions I had done. And the sea otters I didn't begin until 1968.

Evie, alas, has been very ill. For a woman who has an exquisite mind, expression, pronunciation, and a rare and charming personality, it will be a great loss when she leaves us. [Evelyn Ames died in January, 1990]

African Wildlife Leadership Foundation, 1968

Lage: Do you want to talk about the African Wildlife Leadership Foundation, which you mention in your notes in connection with Evie?

Owings: Yes, I got Evie on that. I was the only woman on it, and some of the men didn't like it at all when I came. Russell Train of World Wildlife started it, and I was the only so-called "conservationist" on it.

Lage: Was it big game hunters?

Owings: They were all big game hunters, but they wanted to save parts of Africa. I soon found out that they wanted to save parts of Africa so that they could go and hunt. At the first meeting I thought, "I'll keep completely silent." I said only one thing, and they all looked at me. "Oh, this is what we've got here."

Lage: It gave you away.

Owings: They were ambassadors. They were distinguished men of a certain group. Some of them turned out to be very nice indeed in the end, but different than myself.

Lage: So that was something you didn't stay with very long?

Owings: No, I did. I was on from '68 to '80.

Lage: Anything else about Evie?

Owings: When I encouraged them to have Evie come on, then some of the men looked dismayed at two women. Evie and I, of course, saw eye to eye on absolutely everything.

Later another African wildlife group joined us who were primarily big game hunters of a kind that I have no sympathy with. I don't know how it happened that they joined. They were going bankrupt, I think.

Robinson McIlvaine, who was the ambassador to Kenya from the United States, I had known when I was at Radcliffe, and he was at Harvard. We were both in art history and would go on with Paul Sachs to New York to see the great collections in the private houses. Then I drove back with him afterwards, so that I knew him to begin with.

When Nat and I were in Samburo in Africa on the second trip, I suddenly thought that I saw him over there. Someone said, "The ambassador is here." I liked his wife so much, and they had several children with them. They were just terribly nice people. When he left the ambassadorship he was given the job of being the executive director of African Wildlife, but he leaned on Evie and me because we were the only ones who really felt as he did. He couldn't really express it to the board members.

Lage: Did you make a change in the group, then? Did you see evolution during those twelve years?

Owings: A little. Many of those men were very stamped in their patterns.

Lage: At least they wanted the habitat protected?

Owings: Always, in the back of their minds, was the hunting. At the first meeting there was a report being made about the elephants that were being killed because they were too thick in various areas where small native villages were. I thought, "Well, that is good. They really feel strongly about it."

I can remember walking over to a window with two of them. They said, "Why don't they let us go over there? They have no right to shoot those elephants." They were furious about it for that reason. They wanted to shoot them themselves as trophies.

Paul Winter

Owings: It was Evie who suggested to Paul Winter that he contact me. I first heard him at a concert up in Sacramento under Governor Jerry Brown. It was when the first big wave about whales came into consciousness, and when the first music of the humpbacked whale was recorded by Roger Payne. He was on EDF [Environmental Defense Fund], and I heard those first recordings because I was on the EDF board, too, in New York, and was so thrilled about them--the fact that they analyzed them down to see that the same patterns of notes repeated themselves again and again. It is fascinating. It is really filled with mystery, and we are not anywhere near grasping it yet.

Lage: And the sound itself is just very haunting.

Owings: Oh, yes.

I had heard Paul Winter up there in Sacramento. He did things such as what he has done since. He suddenly darkened the room. He had all these instruments that he invented, in a way--except for his flute that he plays--strange sounds, rubbing things together or doing things. He began to play the flute or sing something with words that one could hear, but just a little.

He put into music the sounds of the whales, and then he asked all the people in this darkened hall, which must have been fifteen hundred people, to do a certain thing in a rhythm, which was like the sea going. It was so thrilling. I just wept, it was so thrilling. Tears ran down my cheeks. So I wrote to him right after that and told him how wonderful it was. Then he wrote to me, and we began a correspondence. He came down here a number of times.

I consider him one of the few men whom I have ever known who is a saint in the way he looks at life and kindness to people, even the way he handles people. He could feel so strongly that he would be bitterly opposed to people, but he goes along in this beautiful way.

I wanted him to do the sea otter. He would send me the tapes: did I like it? I would write back. Then he did one of an eagle. We had a pair of eagles up here that Roland Clement found with us. The eagles would come close and cut the air with their wings. I said he had to get that cut as it went past you, and the cry of the eagle.

He worked on that a long time and wasn't sure that he was satisfied with it. Recently, he has done one on the Grand Canyon with a friend who went with him on that trip, along with a band of other people. He always had the water, always the natural sounds, and they discussed, "Let's do this, or let's do a bird, or let's do these rocks, or look at this, let's do this with the water running down, let's do that." They would stand up and do it extemporaneously. It was extraordinarily beautiful. I saw it on television afterwards.

He saw a raven and he said, "Let's focus on that raven." The raven had come to him because of scraps of food, probably. They had climbed up quite a ways. So he had some of them climb up further with a camera and sound, and then he had sound coming along the way, had someone here, had himself with his flute. Then he wanted them to get that cut of the wings as it flew down.

Lage: Did he become interested in sea otters?

Owings: He did a very delightful, happy little song about sea otters and the cracking of the shells. We went to Grace Cathedral in San Francisco to hear him play those things.

Lage: Did he spend much time here?

Owings: He came a number of times, I'd say. He called our exchange of letters "our dialogue." He wrote, "I have taken all of your suggestions to heart, went out to Pautuxent Center in Maryland to tape sound of eagle's flight."

When the Humane Society gave me the Joseph Wood Krutch Award, the next night he was playing at the Grace Cathedral, almost across from where we were, and he came to that. Then we went over and listened to him. He is one of the rarities of life.

Lage: I want you to finish with everything you have to say about Paul Winter. When I hear somebody called a saint--you sounded so very sincere. He must have quite a presence.

Owings: I don't go around calling people saints. I should have just the right words to describe it. It is a gentleness, a gentleness in his face, in his voice, but especially in his thinking, his plans.

He offered to give us, when we were trying to raise money for the sea otters, a free concert. We couldn't get a place for it. He had so much paraphernalia, and it's a big job to move, and we couldn't find a place for it. We were unable to do it, which I felt very badly about.

Hummingbirds, and Dillon Ripley, Roland Clement, and David Packard

Owings: This house, being an A-frame, reaches up to a kind of ridgepole with about three feet of skylights on either side, and it has been a very pleasant light to live under over the years. But we have one problem, and that relates to hummingbirds. We have a good many hummingbirds around the place, and we have two doors entering that room. If I have the doors open out towards the sea, they can whiz in like a bullet.

At the door out onto the porch I have put up a beaded curtain, which only reminds me of Marlene Dietrich in some of those early movies. When we have sort of serious scientific men come, and they look at this curtain, I have to quickly explain that it's not that I'm trying to be like Marlene Dietrich, I'm just trying to keep the hummingbirds out.

At any rate, it has been interesting to remember certain people, people who have been remarkable in some field, how victorious they have been in helping me get the hummingbirds out. Whereas lots of people come in, crane their heads, look up at the skylight, and with a shrug of the shoulders say, "What are you going to do about it?"

Well, what I do about it is that I got two of our tallest pieces of bamboo and fitted one inside the other, so that it will reach up to thirty-five feet or more. Then I had a fishing pole stuck into the top of that, and then I had a thin ring of bamboo on which I sewed part of my wedding veil from my wedding way back in the very beginnings of time. That wasn't quite successful, so I had to put a ruffle then around it, so that when we got it up

there the little hummingbird would get caught in it. It had to be a light and delicate thing.

Well, people always were astonished at that. And it nearly always happened when I was having guests, or we were just sitting down to dinner or something like that. Someone would be talking very excitedly about something, and then the hummingbird would enter. I thought I'd mention here several of the people who were extraordinarily successful in their endeavors:

The first one was a man I admire very much, and my husband admired very much, Dillon Ripley, who was head of the Smithsonian. Now, Dillon has done incredible things. He's always off to no-man's land looking for one sort of bird or another. It was he who with my husband decided on having a merry-go-round in the middle of the mall in Washington, D.C., one time during some festivity.

At any rate, when he came my husband had just been brought back the night before from the hospital, and so he was in bed, and I was taking care of Dillon and a good many of his friends, all of whom were very distinguished people. In came the hummingbird while I was feeding them lunch. So I got these things together, the bamboo and the ring, and explained about the wedding veil, and everyone thought it was a great riot!

I raised it up, and Dillon said, "Give that to me, Margaret." With that, he raised it very, very slowly. (Some people beat around, and the hummingbird is thrown around right and left.) When he was doing it, the mate of the hummingbird was outside the glass trying to touch with his little bill just where this excited other bird, the inside bird, was beating the glass. He [Dillon Ripley] did it very gently and very quickly, and he brought it down and turned the net so that the ruffles sort of fell over. I had a little drawstring you could pull, and he pulled the string.

We had the windows open, so over everyone's head we moved it out. We turned it over and we held it for a bit out there. Then, whrrrt [whistling sound], it went off. Sometimes people failed, and sometimes they injured the hummingbirds, and sometimes they just looked the other way. Well, that was one of the men I thought I would mention.

Another one was a man I was very devoted to, Roland Clement. He was one of the vice-presidents of National Audubon Society. He's done books on birds and books on so many things. He has a very keen, bright eye, and we always referred to him as the vermillion flycatcher because when we were in Arizona one time with an Audubon group Roland came up to both of us and pointed to a bird that we might have looked right at without realizing what

an extraordinary bird it was. Here he was pointing to a vermillion flycatcher. I told him later that he should write a book because he had had such exciting experiences. I introduced him at an Audubon conference, and I ended the whole thing saying that he was a vermillion flycatcher!

Anyway, Roland came into the house, and he had just been here about five minutes when suddenly the hummingbird came in too. He took hold of that pole with a steady hand, steady, gentle, and absolutely quiet. He moved nothing rapidly. It took no time at all, he twisted it a little, and the hummingbird was in it. Then I rushed out with a drop of honey on my finger--sometimes they are disoriented and have their eyes closed--and the little tongue came out of the hummingbird and licked that and then the little eyes opened, and then it straightened itself up. Then it scooted off. That was the second one.

The third one was David Packard--the Packards had moved next door to us at this time. I didn't know them very well, and I wanted to make lunch, and we had other friends. I wanted to make a lunch that appeared that I hadn't done a thing, but it was going to be something special. We were all seated at the table when suddenly in came the hummingbird.

At first I thought, "I'm not going to pay any attention to this bird," but soon they began to hear it buzzing and humming up there. Their heads began to turn up, and so there was nothing to do but to go get that paraphernalia of the bamboo and the wedding veil. Unfortunately, it was right over our heads, and then it got over the kitchen where I had all the food out. So I had to bring it through.

David Packard didn't say anything. I wasn't sure what his reaction was to this little drama that was taking place. But suddenly he got up and said, "Margaret, give that to me." I gave it to him. In just a few moments that man, who of course has had an extraordinary career doing things in a steady way that nearly all relate to the natural scene--except for those in the computer thing which is something else again--he was so pleased when we got the hummingbird and it flew away, he threw his arms around me and just jumped up and down and said, "We got it! We got it! We got it!"

Robert Redford

Owings: The last one, and then I'll stop talking about this, was Robert Redford. It was the last time he came here. He came in and the

hummingbird naturally came in too! I got this little arrangement put together, and he watched me for a second and said, "Oh, come on, I'll take care of that, Margaret." (It's a strenuous thing that hurts your neck to look up all the time.) He managed it very well, but it was sort of work for him.

Actually I'd forgotten about it, but I had a letter from him a few days ago and he said, "I look forward to a trip up the coast in November. I will call in plenty of time so you can get your wedding veil ready."

Of course, there have been many other people who have been successful, including my caretaker, Jim Brett, who does it pretty well, although he's always saying under his breath, "Jesus!" [laughter]

Lage: Sounds like a wonderful test of character for your guests.

Tell me how you came to know Robert Redford.

Owings: On August 2, 1985, I had a phone call, and a man's voice spoke my name and then said, "Oh, I am so glad to get hold of you. I have been wanting to for two years." I couldn't think who it could be. He said, "This is Robert Redford."

For a moment I thought maybe this is someone fooling me. [laughter] But then he seemed very serious about it. So I said, "Yes, hello." He said he had been trying to put out brush fires since 1971, and he wanted to see some culmination to it. I had known about his period in Utah when he was trying to keep that uranium work from going forward right on the edge of Zion National Park, and also trying to block the increase in the size of a road where he now has this place called Sundance.

He had just bought a few acres there at that time, and was arranging to buy some more, when he found they were starting to wreck the road going up to the canyon. That made him sore. People in Utah began to dislike him thoroughly. He was burned in effigy. People were really getting unpleasant. There were threatening notes to his wife and children. That's when he closed the door and said, "I can't do this."

He stopped for a while, and he decided to concentrate his work in one channel instead of answering every request that came down. For instance, he has done a beautiful recording of the wolves, and another one of the condor, very good. He has done a little mountain lion work for us since then.

Eight years ago, however, he commenced what he called the Institute for Resource Management. Thus far, he has held three conferences, and these conferences are a resolve to action.

Lage: Has he been guided by any particular group or individual?

Owings: I think not, but he has selected a board of trustees.

He brings together opposites. He wants good relations between both sides. The first conference that he did was out there at the Four Corners. They met in Canyon de Chelly with the Hopis and the Navajos, but mostly the Navajos and men from the Peabody Coal Company.

The Navajos, as you probably know, signed over land so that the company could then take their water. So it is just a matter of time before all of their water will be gone in the watershed, and that level of water underground, because those coal companies up there in the Four Corners are running this coal to California, through great conduits right across the United States. That means enormous amounts of water being drained all the time.

Anyway, they met. This was the second conference that was held at Canyon de Chelly on resources versus the Indians--the coal mining and the draining of the water from under the land, apparently. He got top people in the resources. He got the presidents to come. He made it an attractive thing, just as he did the one that I went to. You had a pleasant time. There was no hair-tearing, or anything of that sort. They tried to keep it at a low key. But obviously, very shortly the differences came out rather clearly.

Lage: Did he feel that he made any changes in people's attitudes?

Owings: Yes. He felt good about that. I have letters he has written to me about that particular one of the Indians and the coal mining.

He had a little band of men, a committee who worked with him, and they found several excellent speakers for the Indians. And then, as I say, they also got the top men, the presidents of these big companies that were doing these extraordinary things, including polluting the air so badly. These men had never even met an Indian. They knew nothing about it. So that first it was to be friendships that he set about to accomplish, then to try to reach an understanding.

Lage: It takes someone like a Robert Redford to get people to come to that.

Owings: Yes.

For myself, although I had seen Robert Redford in some movies, I hadn't ever thought about him, but I knew that people seemed charmed by him. When I grew to know him he is dozens of times more charming than he is in any movie. He catches you, and he has a good understanding with the person he is talking with. He's very, very good at that. He has a natural ability to do it that way. That's why he caught my interest.

Lage: What did he have on his mind when he called you?

Owings: He just wanted to call me. He decided that it was time, that he wanted to know me. And he asked me if I would come down to a conference they were commencing down here at Morro Bay, in a hotel that I had never seen, very charming. "Would I drive down? It would be great if I would." It was dealing with offshore oil drilling.

I thought for a moment it might really relate to our otters, but it didn't, because they were moving in broader geographic ways, in a sense, although the otters were brought up. They decided they would send people up to Alaska--Barrow, I think it was--to meet with oil companies and the Eskimos, and then conservation-minded people and scientists who knew the damage being done to the wildlife, caribou and so on. It was a very interesting meeting of several days.

Lage: That was in 1985?

Owings: Yes. Anyway, after I attended his Institute for Resource Management meeting down at Morro Bay, Robert wrote to me saying the meeting was a real watershed for the institute. "I think we have created an environment of trust that can lead to real solutions on the outer continental shelf."

Soon after, he came up to our place here in Big Sur, and he brought his daughter, Aimee, who is a lovely little girl. As I said, she was like a rosebud. He appreciated the place and the pattern of life and, as he called it, "the God-given views and all the smells and sounds that make up Grimes Point."

He said there was a period in his life that this [Grimes Point] meant a great deal to him. When he was down in Hollywood, which he does not like, and does not like Los Angeles, he had a choice to make. Should he go into one of these long television stories that go on forever? He would have been paid well, and he was low on funds and had a family of several children and a wife

to support. He was about to do it, and then he had a request from Neil Simon to do "Barefoot in the Park."

He had to think this over quite a bit, so he put a pack on his back and he walked from Hollywood up the coast, stopping along the way, the way the hippies were doing at the time. He came up and watched us beginning to build the house here. It was just getting done.

Lage: So he had seen this house long ago?

Owings: Not the house, because he didn't come down here, but from the road. He just sat up there and watched, and thought. It was a changing point in his life. In working under Neil Simon and the producer, whoever that was, he really learned in earnest about acting, rather than the superficial thing he had undertaken at the beginning.

Lage: This was early on in his career.

Owings: Yes.

Down there in Morro Bay was an audience of all these oil men, the presidents of all these different companies, and it wasn't too common to have them all get together. He didn't choose hot-headed environmentalists; he chose people whom he had looked into quite carefully, and saw they were sound and reasonable and could exchange views in a moderate and forceful way.

He always has a little humor in his talk. He began by saying, "I was once connected with an oil company." And he gave the name of the oil company. He said, "When I got out of college, my father worked for an oil company and he told me that I ought to get a job with them." The job was to move oil in big cans with a roller from one part of the yard to a place where it went on to a boat. The company office was there, and he knew his father was probably looking out of the window at him. He did it once, and he saw that it was easy, and got all the containers in. So he thought he could do it better, so he put twice as many on the rollers, and hurried a little bit more. There was no point in wasting time over this job. The whole thing tipped over just as it got to the edge of the wharf.

For a moment, he said, he listened, and then he heard all the windows of the office being thrown open. He said, "After that, I just sent in my regrets and left and went on to do other things." But he told it in a very funny way, so that everyone was relaxed.

He talked, when he came here, about Out of Africa. I had been to Africa twice and knew Isak Dinesen's house and had read everything Isak Dinesen ever wrote, and realized that perhaps he was not the perfect selection for Denys Finch Hatton. I wondered, how could he do it? How could he be Denys Finch Hatton, who was an aristocratic Englishman, and bald on top of his head? (Redford had a lot of hair tumbled down all the time.) I didn't say anything, but we had a wonderful hour talking about it.

Lage: Did you give him any of this feedback? You seem as if you really have a feeling for Isak Dinesen.

Owings: Oh, I do, I do.

Lage: Did you discuss that with him?

Owings: Yes, I did.

She was wonderful at telling stories. Nat and I were in her house--of course when she was no longer there, because she lost everything. But here was the fireplace where they sat and where she would begin a story. When she began a story, she would never begin it herself, she would let someone sitting beside her say a sentence or two, and out of that she would pluck a story, which is very charming indeed.

At any rate, we had a good time. After that, he sent me several other books about Isak Dinesen. We had a lot of exchange material going through the mail.

Next, he chose to do the Milagro Beanfield War. We discussed which town it should be laid in. I had one idea, although I knew the people were very rough there. It wasn't as spectacular as Truchas [New Mexico] was. He came down [to New Mexico]. Nat had died before this, so I had been clearing out our New Mexican house. Young Nat took him around and showed him the house. He felt the adobe and he liked it and began to feel all the things we had felt about the house.

Nat loaned him our truck that we had had since 1952. It was an old truck, and it had a bullet hole in the windshield. Also, the windshield wipers didn't work. There were many things that were wrong with the truck, which was exactly what Redford wanted. He wanted a truck that really was beaten up. I don't know how they ever got it up the mountain to Truchas, but they did.

Lage: That truck was in the movie?

Owings: Oh yes. And one time when he came back he said, "You know something, your truck is as important an actor in the movie as any of the actors." They really featured it. They caught the sound of the truck going over gravel. Do you remember that gravelly sound? The whole sound thing was quite impressive.

Lage: I thought the movie was very moving.

Owings: It was a very creative thing, and I wrote him such.

He sent me tickets to go to it. With a friend, I went up to San Francisco to view it. Humorously enough, suddenly the spotlight moved around and it went on the man sitting just in front of me. They said, "Here we have Mr. Redford's father." Robert always worried about what his father thought of him, because he felt he had been a big disappointment to him.

Lage: His father, the oil company man?

Owings: Yes, but he had been retired. I don't think he was a big man on campus, as it were, but he had worked for oil. The light shone on him. That seemed to leave an impression on people.

After it was over, I leaned over and spoke with his father and told him about the country that this was about, and how close it was to my life, and how I knew his son. At that point, everyone rushed up to get my autograph. [laughter] I wrote afterwards to Robert and I said, "Maybe they thought I was Mercedes." You remember Mercedes, the woman who threw mud balls at everyone who came by?

Lage: Yes.

Let me ask you what you thought of him in Out of Africa. What did you think of his portrayal of Denys Finch Hatton?

Owings: I liked the whole movie so much. I liked him in his role. I knew it especially well after Robert sent me the book just devoted to Denys. I realized he was different.

At the beginning, they tried to have Robert use an English accent, and he was always slipping back to his American. Finally he said, "No, I'm just going to be myself. That's all I can do. I can just be myself." So he just was himself. And, of course, Meryl Streep was just lovely.

I asked him immediately, of course, about the lions, because I thought, "My God, they shot that lion." He said, "I knew you were going to ask that." He said, "No, they had some tame lions

they had brought in." The first one, when Meryl Streep came on, and he sort of brushed it away, was a lion that had been a tamed lion. The second one, when the two of them were out together and they shot at the lion and it dropped dead, that was a mixture of special effects. It was not a true lion kill. He respects life, in other words, and wouldn't have anything to the contrary.

In the Milagro Beanfield War there was a pig. You saw the pig, and you saw it in silhouette, you saw it walking, and you saw it where it shouldn't be, you saw it lying down when it started to go through the battle line, when the war began, as it were. Our truck was here, the pig came out there, and he walked right down the rows of beans. They raised their guns and apparently shot it.

Robert wouldn't have allowed the pig to be shot, of course. He made them dig a hole large enough for the pig. It was a very large pig. They shot the gun and were sort of pushing the pig along so that it ran and fell into the hole the minute the gun went off. Later, of course, they extracted it from the hole. He [the pig] came into the act at the end, like an opera where all those who have been killed come out in front of the curtain and bow, which was very funny.

I also sent him a poem that I had written on Truchas years and years ago when it was really the Truchas that no longer is. He was so charmed by it. I wrote it in 1937 when my husband Mac and I went up to the mountain towns--and we spent a month in Alcalde in the valley. I found a beautiful, sort of morbid loneliness up there that caught me. I sent a copy of the poem to Redford. He wrote me several times about it, and he said he had it thumbtacked up in front of his desk.

No keys to close these doors of isolation,
Pathless gates and shafts or broken dwellings
Where dregs of wine stain floorboards
And pale blue walls stand to crumble
The frenzied echo of night riders
Crushing the splinters of silent crosses,
As the church stands idle.

Where have they gone,
Splintered sorrows, sky-written dreams,
Now deep in tangled grasses
And a foot below?
Pressed by hoofs is the foolish laughter
But the hungers still rise windbound.

Oh meet me there
By the dark cornice,

By the spider's shadow,
By the flutter of torn muslin.
Old desires lie broken--and I am alone
Tormenting unsought-for memories.

Then I sent him [looking through papers] a card that I had drawn of an open shell. I explained it was "...from which life has flown but beauty remains." I had picked the shell up on a broad beach on Calvert Island in British Columbia, and thought a lot about its symbol. He responded to it very, very warmly and said, "This is a gift you have given me, and I am sending you a gift." A number of these books over here [pointing to a low table in the living room covered with books] came from him.

I would also like to include here a portion of a letter I wrote to Redford.

Dear Robert:

Your two recent visits to Wild Bird--during which you shared lovely Sonya with me--and brought such a feeling of warmth and pleasure to the house, not to mention the food you brought down in baskets like the Indians bringing food to their kivas before the dance begins.

All too wonderful to be true! And when you two brought three white stones up from the beach, the smallest in Sonya's little hand and the larger two arranged by you with a sprig of Paintbrush--left one of those imprints on the mind that I won't forget. (And the stones are where you placed them on the dining table despite the 22 people I served lunch to several days later.)

Thank you again for coming!

Fondly,
Margaret Owings

Adlai Stevenson

Lage: You had some stories to tell of Adlai Stevenson?

Owings: Adlai came down to our place after a super luncheon at the Clift that Nat had dreamed up, thin sliced salmon, thin sliced ham,

ADLAI STEVENSON AT CHRISTENING
Godson Kevin McClatchy, left, and grandson John Stevenson

our shared grandson

Proud Grandfather

Adlai's Armload

Adlai Stevenson played a dual role —grandfather and godfather — at a double christening here yesterday.

"A wonderful excuse to come to San Francisco," said the U. S. Ambassador to the United Nations.

The babies, christened at a ceremony at the First Unitarian Church, were the first-born of Stevenson's son, John Fell Stevenson, and the Ambassador's godchild, Kevin McClatchy, son of the C. K. McClatchys of Sacramento and grandnephew of Eleanor McClatchy, publisher of the Sacramento Bee.

As he held his grandson in his arm, at the request of photographers, Stevenson noted the three-months-old infant's full cheek and impassive stare, then remarked to a nearby newsman:

"This is John Fell Stevenson Jr., but we call him Mao Tse-tung, because of his general contour."

Alicia Patterson (Mrs. Harry F. Guggenheim), editor and publisher of Newsday in Garden City, N. Y., also flew out for the ceremony. She is the Stevenson baby's godmother.

Later in the day Stevenson appeared at the dedication of a tree in his honor by the Berkeley Rotary Club at Tilden Regional Park in the East Bay.

He planned to spend the weekend at the Big Sur home of architect Nathaniel Owings, whose daughter is the mother of John Fell Stevenson Jr.

The Ambassador will leave Wednesday for Vancouver, B. C., to speak at a college commencement exercise.

caviar, strawberries and champagne. (This was after the christening ceremony at the Unitarian church in San Francisco for John Fell Stevenson, Jr., Natalie [Owings] and John Fell's baby.) Adlai was given a bunch of newspapers carrying his picture holding the "twins" and laughing, and I saw him over at our living room desk tearing them out and stuffing them into envelopes, writing. I discovered later when he left one behind, that it said "Which twin uses the Tony?" Remember those ads? [See following page.]

Because he was leaving later that afternoon for Vancouver to give a commencement address at a university up there, I asked him if he didn't want time to scratch out some notes on what he was going to say. He looked up at me and said, "Margaret, by this time, after all I've been through, if it doesn't just roll off my tongue without notes I might as well give up."

He loved to tell anecdotes about himself, always making himself a fool, and they were very funny! Over the dinner table one night--we may have mentioned horses--out came this story from Adlai. He was a guest at a large estate in Portugal and the host asked Adlai if he knew horses. Adlai answered, "Of course, I've ridden horses all my life" (meaning his nice little horse he had in the pasture at his home in Barrington, Illinois). The host then said, "Tomorrow morning we'll go out to spear a hog, and I have a fine horse I can give you." Adlai was uneasy. The next morning he was given riding gear and taken out into the courtyard where there were many horses and men and dogs, etc., and two grooms trying to control a handsome horse standing on its hind feet. This was "Adlai's horse." He approached it with some misgivings, and after he mounted it, he was almost thrown immediately. Then he was handed a long spear, for as the guest of honor he was going to be permitted to spear the wild boar. (He was inwardly terrified since he'd never done such a thing, and he didn't want to spear the boar.)

Anyway, after they had been out half an hour, a boar was spotted, and Adlai was told to advance, but just as he was shaking all over, both from his horse and from the thought of piercing the boar, a man galloped up and informed him he was wanted immediately back to the house for an international crisis. Need I say how he felt about this salvation?

He loved our picnics on the ridge above our place here in Big Sur. We would lie in the grass with the world stretching out below us drinking wine and munching sandwiches. He would say, "Oh, if only we could hold our key United Nations meetings up here just like this, we would solve the problems of the world!"

Mary Lasker in New York City was one of Adlai's lady friends, of which he had quite a few. Somehow, women were immediately drawn to him, including myself. Well, Mary decided to give a dinner party in her apartment on Park Avenue, and she invited every woman she knew that Adlai had coveted. She invited Adlai to arrive at a later hour, without telling him who was coming. When he came in the door, there was one woman after another, easily a dozen--including Evie Ames, who told me this story. If Adlai ever blushed, he did so then!

And another story, Adlai had a dream two nights before the Kennedys went down to Dallas, and in his dream Jack was shot. It troubled Adlai so much that he wondered if he should simply tell them to call off the trip. He put in a call and then cancelled it. We were at Adlai's apartment in the Waldorf-Astoria for a dinner party about a week following Jack's death when a call came to Adlai at the dinner table. He said he couldn't take the call, but then he found it was Jackie. Jackie had been going through her husband's cuff link box and had just found the one of Adlai's old shoe with the hole in the sole. Remember it?

George and Gerry Lindsay

Lage: You are going to talk about George Lindsay?

Owings: George, yes. And then later he married Gerry, who became such a close friend of mine.

I was first aware of George Lindsay when I received a letter from him telling me about a "scientific," as he said, so-called "study" of whales. This was a time when the whale population was very low. Yet some scientists had decided that they needed to kill sixty gray whales.

Lage: When was this?

Owings: In 1967.

Lage: So he wrote you without knowing you before because he knew of your interest in wildlife?

Owings: It was during those years when there were only some three thousand migrating whales from the north down to the lagoons in Baja. And they wanted to take sixty of them for "scientific studies." George was beside himself and couldn't understand it. Of course, the minute I read it I couldn't understand it.

He asked me--I was in Washington a lot--if it was possible for me to talk this over with the assistant secretary of the interior for fish and wildlife, Stanley Cain.

Lage: That was the job that Nathaniel Reed had at another time?

Owings: That's right.

I went in there clutching George's letter. It was one of the times I was back there for a board meeting for Defenders of Wildlife. I went up and asked to speak to Stanley Cain--I had met him once before. He immediately rang a bell of some sort, and we moved into a large room with a long, long table. He asked everyone to come in, all the different people in Fish and Wildlife to come in. Here I was sitting at the end of this table.

Lage: Were you by yourself?

Owings: I was by myself, and I did not know a great deal about whales. I wanted him to know what was happening and how obviously wrong it was. I spoke about George Lindsay, who was the director of the California Academy of Sciences, asking me to draw their attention to it. George said at the time that he used to go on census flights from San Diego with Dr. Carl L. Hubbs from Scripps. That was in 1961. That was when he first became aware of and interested in particular in whales.

Lage: How did Stanley Cain and the others respond to your presentation?

Owings: They all listened to me. I said more than I am saying now. They asked me a few questions. Then they talked to one another about it. Cain asked them to look into it. Suddenly, George was notified--but he didn't get a letter from Cain--that they were going to bring this to a stop. (They had already killed a number of them.) So it was closed off.

Just the other day I was talking to George. I reminded him that I had done this. (I don't know that I even had had time to write him and tell him that I had done it.) At any rate, he said, "I had never understood why they suddenly stopped, and no one could do it anymore."

Lage: I think we should talk more about your relationship with George Lindsay. He may become an interviewee himself.

Owings: He should.

The second time that I heard from George Lindsay was after he read Glimpse of Eden, the book Evie Ames wrote about the trip we took to Africa. He read the book and saw my name in it. That must have been in 1967.

After that, George and Gerry were married [1972]. Gerry had been working as a volunteer at the Academy of Services, and had been teaching volunteers how to do volunteer work and so forth. It was a happy marriage for both of them, and they did a great deal for each other.

So that at that point, I met Gerry. We took some trips together. And when Gerry came down here she loved it, and it meant a great deal to her. She was here during the prolonged period in which she was fighting cancer with many operations. George loved her so, he wanted to keep her alive, although she said to me one time, "If it weren't for George, I wouldn't go on."

In 1979, the academy presented me and Sylvia Earl with their Conservation Award, in the form of a metal replica of the Wildlife Conservation postage stamp depicting a California Condor, mounted on marble. This was a handsome honor which I appreciated.

Lage: Were you a fellow of the academy?

Owings: Yes. I became a fellow.

Lage: Did you make any trips with them down to Baja California?

Owings: No, we didn't, although we often went on our own.

The Lindsays came out to visit us in New Mexico, and we had an especially good time together. They loved the cliff dwellings, and we picnicked and climbed around some of those wonderful spots. They seemed to feel when they were there that they were really out of the country--some other land. They traveled a good deal less the last couple of years during Gerry's increasing illness. It was not easy, and often she had to return because of the difficulties she was going through.

Then Nat, who loved Hopi kachinas, had a kachina show at the academy. Nat was a person who always had to run the thing himself. Here he was up at the academy with a lot of people running certain things, and he wanted to run the whole thing. If they did something wrong, he wanted it changed. It gave George quite a shock, but Nat seemed to be unaware of it. I would speak to Nat as we left the academy, but to no avail. Anyway, it was a splendid show! I don't know if you had an opportunity to see it. It had models of some of the Hopi pueblos, wall murals of dancing,

sounds of singing voices and drums, of course, and lots of kachinas.

Gerry gave the Hopis a Hopi dinner that night. One of the Indians, Dr. Emory Sekaquaptewa, got up and began tapping on the table with something. It sounded like a drum. Here, in a dining room on Washington Street, in one of those big houses so far from the Hopi pueblos, we were all just suddenly caught by the rhythm, and then down deep in his throat, the beginning of the singing that went with it. I will remember it all my life. Extraordinary! It didn't matter what the setting was, or anything. We suddenly were transported there.

Gerry was a much-loved person. When the Environmental Defense Fund gave me a dinner when I retired, they asked Gerry to speak. She was very helpful in getting some of her friends to come so that there was a very large group there at the academy in the big room with all of the animals. Gerry was the only one who spoke beautifully, just beautifully. Even then, she was in pain. I can remember looking up from my table at her blue eyes as she spoke and seeing pain in her face. It was very moving, very dear.

One of the last things that Gerry asked to do when she was moving around still was to come down here. We would sit out there on the porch and talk things over. We had quite a bit in common, and understanding. We also went out to Pepperwood, the place the academy owns in Sonoma, and I have pictures of Gerry and me. There were these things that especially brought the two of us together.

When she died, everyone came to a memorial meeting in the big hall at the academy. It was filled. George spoke. It is not easy for him to talk about her because she meant such a great deal to him. Her death meant a great, great loss. At the end is where he spoke with a letter that I had written to her. I didn't expect it. I'd written these letters, and she would keep them and ask them to be read to her. This is the letter:

[reading]

> Dearest Gerry,
>
> As I drove up the coast this morning, everything was crystal clear with the wind, the kind of wind that pounds the sea. I was thinking of you with your wonderful spirit, and thinking of the places you have loved and the people who love you. Fallen Leaf, perhaps, in a canoe gliding through the waters in the late afternoon. Pepperwood, with its gentle, rolling

slopes which you have shared these recent years with George. Big Sur's immensity that enfolds one. And in these moments that are so hard to bear, I hope you can slip into these places and find a peace, knowing that you are a part of them.

Margaret

What can I tell you about George? Something funny! George and I always laugh a lot together. He has a chuckle of a laugh. I often bring on his chuckle, which pleases me. Some people I never make laugh. They think I am a very solemn person. But I make George laugh all the time.

He retired from the directorship of the Academy of Sciences, and there were some awkward, difficult times for a while. Now, a new director is coming in, and he feels more relaxed.

In 1986, I received a Christmas card from him standing beside a straight, tall tree twice his height, with no leaves but blossoms on its twigs, clearly unfamiliar to the botanists. His message read:

Happy holidays, Margaret,
from a couple of old
endangered species seen in
Namibia last August--
PACHYPODIUM LEALII and ME.

SWAP and Emily and Ben Polk, 1966

[Addition written by Margaret Owings, including her approximation of interviewer questions:]

Riess: I see that one of your files is on Emily Polk.

Owings: Yes. It was in 1966, I believe, when I was in the thick of park and wildlife work, that I answered the phone one evening to hear the clear, quite lovely voice of a woman who introduced herself as Emily Polk from Los Osos near Morro Bay. She quickly went on to explain that she and her architect husband had recently moved here after a decade in India.

Her husband, Ben, was now a professor at Cal Poly in San Luis Obispo, and she herself had explored the region and decided to form an environmental organization which she planned to call Small

Wilderness Areas Preserved. "It's about saving the oaks," she explained, and she asked me quite simply how she should go about doing this. Apparently she knew no one in the environmental field, nor did she know how parks were established.

I was about to explain that I was far, far too deep in parks and mountain lion work, that I could give her no time. I was abrupt, but her voice and choice of words literally held me spellbound as she began to unfold a description of a forest of ancient twisted live oaks growing in the dunes near Los Osos--"extending their limbs in strange contortions," to quote her. A mobile-home developer was already moving in and cutting trees five or six hundred years old. Yes, I was caught, and in being caught I was to find a friend who enriched and influenced my life.

Riess: You grew up among those old live oaks in Berkeley. This probably rang a bell.

Owings: That it did. As a child, I entered my upstairs bedroom climbing over a huge rock, then transferred myself to an oak limb that rested on the rock, and from there I climbed up the limb like a small bridge reaching the window box, then through an unlocked window where I jumped down into the hallway. It was all very logical.

Well, I guess Emily intuitively touched old memories. So, without having met this rare voice in person, I began to send her out to talk with conservation activists such as Ansel Adams, Edgar Wayburn, Pearl Chase, Sylvia McLaughlin, to name but a few, and I also sent her out to people with funds and to state park headquarters in Sacramento, where she astonished the personnel.

One of the first notes I received from her I find among a file of her papers: "Margaret--For a moment, most days, I step out on the little brown tiled paper launching pad you built for me, and fly off to explore the mysteries you've charted. As with most, the first glance reveals the form of the secret, but the deeper the probe, the more complex the revelation. Thank you for these adventures. Emily."

She had now condensed her Small Wilderness Areas Preserved to SWAP, and Ansel, who hesitated over "cute initials," came up with even a cuter derivative for SWAP--"small whims and purchases." He laughed, but Emily turned away. This was no "small whim." But Ansel was helpful in many ways too numerous to describe.

I introduced Emily by phone to Jane and Justin Dart in Beverly Hills. Up to that moment Justin was not known as an ardent conservationist, although Jane warmed to the thought. But

it was singly by phone that Emily won from Justin Dart the needed funds to bring these fifty-eight untouched acres of forest into the state park system. She not only had a sound conservation grasp but also had poetry within herself to explain it to others.

Riess: Was she able to accomplish other small preserves?

Owings: Yes, indeed. Before she left the country she had thirteen other land-saving projects, some achieved and some underway. And she had built up a sound group of SWAP branches in the state. But the oaks were something special, a real wildness in that small forest the Chumash Indians apparently frequented, but the white man had somehow left untouched until the mobile-home developer commenced to move in.

As we grew to know one another, Emily and I used to make excursions down there with sandwiches and champagne. We would climb the trees and settle ourselves in the great arms and elbows to talk and laugh for hours.

While Emily was working to gather funds for the Los Osos oaks, she had handsome photographs taken of the twisted trees, and these were printed in folders. When she had accomplished her mission she gazed sadly at the heaps of leftover folders lying waste, but it was not long before her nimble fingers and creative eye took over. She began to play with scissors, cutting shapes out of the textures in the chiaroscuro of the oak forest and gluing them on to large matboards to make illusive patterns. They were stunning. She called them "a new graphics idiom," and so they were. They were hung with acclaim in a distinguished one-man show at the Natural History Museum in Los Angeles.

In the meantime, her husband Ben, whenever he was home from his college classes, was playing on a large grand piano in the closed-off carport in their small Los Osos home. What he played was totally his own in what he called "a matrix of improvisions," with form he discovered in "tone structure vertically as chords and horizontally as melody."

Riess: What does that mean?

Owings: I couldn't quite grasp it. He taped these fascinating sounds and overlaid the tapes with further playing. A friend took some of his tapes to Mlle. Nadia Boulanger in Paris, that remarkable woman, then ninety years old, who still took on students and still sought originality among musicians. She must have been electrified by what she heard because she communicated with Ben to come immediately to study with her.

Off they went, and while Ben was with music, Emily, not idle long, explored the narrow streets of Paris and wrote a series of short stories like dream sequences, copies of which she sent to me to read. She did not press on having them published, and so with her drawers filled with poems and manuscripts, next she turned to portrait painting with imaginative qualities.

Before she left for France she painted a portrait of me with our little A-frame house above my head and the sea whitening the rocks below. In a sense it was a goodbye. For then they were off to Sri Lanka for another year, where Emily wrote a book about the old temples and ruins and old bridges, and Ben illustrated it with photographs. In a sense, it was a beautiful piece of embroidery, but it was not accepted by publishers. Perhaps too rich.

Riess: Apparently they moved around continually.

Owings: Yes, but what they both extracted from each place had depth, not just a surface to observe, but to make something personal and creative with part of themselves.

Their ten years in India which preceded my introduction to them was constantly in their minds, but it was not until a number of years spent in Salisbury, England, that they settled down to present an encyclopedia of their experiences and accomplishments in a slender and beautiful Indian Notebook, published in 1985. They wrote it together, with chapters by each, distinct in style and viewpoint: Ben's designing the national memorial at Amritsar and the great Tripitaka Library in Rangoon as well as the Royal Palace at Kathmandu, while Emily was publishing a volume of poetry, Poems and Epigrams, with an introductory verse I want to include, so essentially Emily with its dry humor in contrast to the lyric quality of much of her work.

> In this collection/ are stones found on forbidden walks,/ bottles empty of false solutions,/ pins that held unlike together,/ rusted and bent--/ some frayed conclusions/ displayed for your inspection.

In England, Ben was climbing up into the vaults of small twelfth century churches to study and measure their tie beams. This apparently was an architectural study to date them rather than an architectural study. Emily was steadily working on what she calls "extensionist paintings in black and white," for a private viewing in the Salisbury Playhouse. And this brings us up to date in 1987. The omission of more moments in the Polks' lives is due to withholding myself from writing a book about them.

I would like to have at the close of this manuscript this statement written by Emily Polk when she gathered her funds for Small Wilderness Area Preservation:

> A gift of nature is a growing gift of gratitude for the living earth renewed by hour, day, year, century. A gift of nature is an imperishable gift, never broken, torn, lost, worn--the gift that given once is given forever; that given once, exuberantly gives itself in return, not alone to the giver or the receiver but to all creatures of earth for all time.

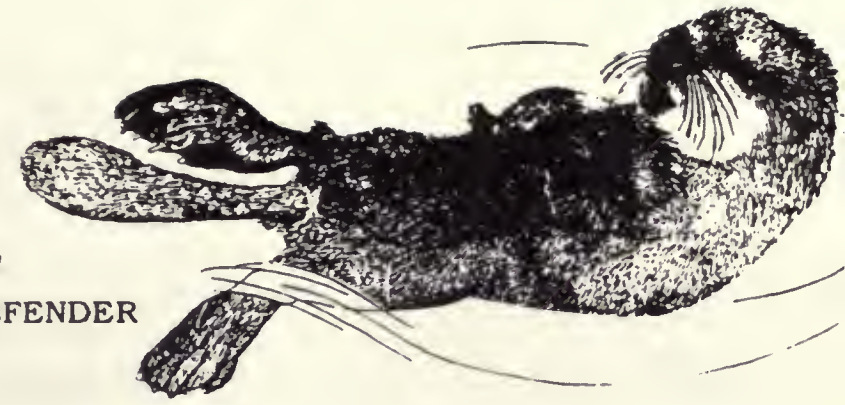
The Regional Oral History Office of The Bancroft Library,
University of California at Berkeley
and
The Monterey Bay Aquarium

cordially invite you to a reception in honor of

MARGARET WENTWORTH OWINGS

on the occasion of the presentation of her oral history

ARTIST, AND WILDLIFE AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENDER



Thursday, February 21, 1991
7:00 - 9:00 pm

Formal Presentation at the Aquarium's Sea Otter Exhibit at 7:30pm

The Monterey Aquarium • 886 Cannery Row • Monterey, California

R.S.V.P. 408-648-4802

Suzanne Riess, Margaret Owings and Ann Lage at the oral history presentation.

Environmentalist Margaret Owings cited

BY MARGO BURKE
Herald Staff Writer

Margaret Wentworth Owings of Big Sur was honored at a reception this week at the Monterey Bay Aquarium on the occasion of the presentation of her oral history.

Her life, dedicated to environmental and wildlife preservation, is recalled in "Artist and Wildlife and Environmental Defender," just completed by historians at the Bancroft Library of the University of California at Berkeley.

During the reception, author Wallace Stegner spoke of Mrs. Owings' "staunch stubbornness . . . effectiveness and grace" as champion of sea otters, sea lions, mountain lions, redwoods and wild and scenic places.

Former state Sen. Fred Farr recalled how she spearheaded lobbying campaigns in Sacramento and built effective environmental organizations, using her personal influence and charm.

Others who paid tribute to Mrs. Owings included Dr. Gerry Lindsay, former director of the California Academy of Sciences; Maurice Hornocker of the Wild Life Research Institute; Sharon Negri of Mountain Lion Preservation; and Dr. James Mattison, co-founder of the Friends of the Sea Otter.

In addition to documenting her wildlife crusade, the oral history covers her family history and the influence of friends such as Georgia O'Keeffe, Wallace and Mary Stegner, Rachael Carson, Jane Goodall, Robert Redford, Adlai Stevenson and many others.

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Frank Wesley Wentworth
1879 - 1955
Jean Baird Pond Wentworth
1883 - 1979

Frank and Jean Wentworth were New Englanders who came west early in this century. He was born November 18, 1879 in Chelsea, Massachusetts, and graduated from Dartmouth College in 1903. Mrs. Wentworth, born Jean Baird Pond, February 21, 1883 in Boston, graduated from Smith College in 1905, and later earned a Masters degree at the University of Chicago.

Mr. Wentworth's first job was with the Library Bureau of Boston, manufacturers and distributors of office, library and school equipment. He visited San Francisco shortly after the earthquake and fire of 1906, and despite the devastation, became convinced that the Bay Area was where he wanted to live. He was appointed Pacific Coast sales manager for the Library Bureau, and he and his wife settled in Berkeley in 1910, the year of their marriage.

With the onset of World War I, Mr. and Mrs. Wentworth both played active roles in the American Red Cross. Foremost was their leadership in launching ingenius fund raising programs coupled with their civic parts in fighting the dreaded influenza epidemic of 1916 when it struck Berkeley.

Shortly after his arrival in the Bay Area, Mr. Wentworth formed his own firm, the F. W. Wentworth Co., which distributed supplies and equipment for schools, libraries and offices. In addition, a successful commercial printing business was launched. This grew into a major concern with sales outlets in the principal cities of the west. In 1928 the business was merged with Remington Rand, which operated nationally in the same field. After serving as a Vice President of Remington Rand for a short period, Mr. Wentworth "retired" in 1929.

Many a man, after a successful career in business, is content to spend the rest of his life at ease. Frank Wentworth was not; after his retirement he devoted himself to public service in a variety of fields and distinquished himself in all.

While serving on the Berkeley city council for four years, Mr. Wentworth was a leader in the movement to make Berkeley one of the first cities in the nation to embrace a city manager form of administration, involving professional non-political management of operations within fiscal limits set by the council.

Starting in 1930 and for 18 years thereafter, Mr. Wentworth dedicated a major share of his time and attention to the interests of Mills College in Oakland, first as a Trustee followed by 17 years as Financial Vice President and Treasurer. The financial support environment for private colleges in these grim depression and war years had never been so bad. Joining with Dr. Aurelia Reinhardt, the President, also from New England, the two leaders

with "caution and courage", to use the words of the college historian, brought the College successfully through those dark and threatening years. Academia nevertheless provided many pleasant and stimulating sidelights to the Wentworths, foremost being the close friendships with faculty and students. Their home was a "home away from home" for countless numbers of students, foreign as well as American.

Concurrent with his responsibilities in the higher education field, Mr. Wentworth served on the Board of Directors of the East Bay Municipal Utility District from 1933 to 1945, including the last three war-time years as President of the Board. Service was without salary despite heavy calls on time and energy, particularly during the war years of accelerated demands for water arising from new army and navy facilities, industrial expansion, and enlarged residential needs.

Frank and Jean Wentworth together held the thought that God was present in their oak-shaded garden, in the Sierra forests, canyons, lakes and even in our great southwestern deserts. Their simple mountain cabin on the edge of a small Sierra lake was their stately mansion of the spirit, their private Mecca.

Consistent with their philosophy it was natural that Frank Wentworth should choose to ally himself with the program of the Save-the-Redwoods League. For him the ancient redwood giants stood as the most dramatic and unique expression of God's creative powers. In his mind there were religious as well as aesthetic reasons for their preservation. He became a member of the Save-the-Redwoods League in 1920, was elected to its Council in 1927, and from 1930 until his death in 1955 served as Director, Vice-President and Chairman of its Finance Committee. In the 1956 bulletin of the League Newton B. Drury, then its President, wrote: "It was in the League that Frank Wentworth made his greatest contribution, for which he will be long remembered. He brought to bear on the League's program his practical idealism and broad abilities. His consistent devotion to the Save-the-Redwoods cause was one of the important elements in its success."

Frank and Jean Wentworth had two children:

Margaret Wentworth Owings, a Mills College graduate, class of 1935, and a resident of Big Sur. She is the wife of the late internationally recognized architect Nathaniel Owings. By a previous marriage she has one daughter, Anne, and one grandson. Mrs. Owings leads an active life both as an artist and as one of the nation's leading conservationists. She and her late husband were a team in the struggle to preserve important scenic and historic treasures. For many years she has led the fight to save from extinction California's sea otters and mountain lions. An added contribution to conservation was her service on the California Park and Recreation Commission from 1963 to 1969. For her work in the field of conservation she was the 1983 recipient of the Audubon Medal, one of only four women to receive this prestigious honor during the twenty-eight years it has been awarded.

3.

William Pond Wentworth, a Stanford graduate, class of 1933, MBA 1935; resides in Berkeley with his wife, Harriet Peel Wentworth, U.C. Berkeley graduate, AB 1934. William Wentworth has been an investment counsellor since 1936 and a founder of the San Francisco-based and nationally recognized counsel firm of Wentworth, Hauser and Violich. Following the lead of his father, William Wentworth since 1971 has served as Treasurer and Director of the Save-the-Redwoods League. He and his wife have three children, Frank W. Wentworth, Allan P. Wentworth, and Jean Wentworth Bush, who in turn have produced for them nine grandchildren.

Such is the biographical life path established by Frank and Jean Wentworth, two New Englanders who shifted their roots to the San Francisco Bay Area at the end of the first decade of the twentieth century. For all of us Wentworths, senior parents, children and grandchildren, it proved to be a move which brought a multitude of good blessings.

March 3, 1986

Prepared by William P. Wentworth

This became our little insignia for Point Lobos League — Drawn by Mwo *

Saving the Carmel Beach

By MARGARET ~~MILLARD~~, Secretary
Point Lobos League
Margaret Owings

SHALL we measure time with the passage of tides? How many have come? And how many will come. rolling onto these shores. streaming over these rocks. rising and falling with the moon's course?

You and I. standing on this Pacific coast beach. might well feel insignificant as we pause to consider this passage of time. Rachel Carson. in her book *The Sea Around Us* observes. man "often forgets the true nature of his planet and the long vistas of its history. in which the existence of the race of men has occupied a mere moment of time."

Yet during that brief period. man has managed to possess and destroy much of the earth's surface including a large part of the limited line of coastlands. He rarely approaches a cove and beach. a cliff and inlet. with reverence for preservation. Instead. this comparatively rare area appears a fresh challenge to his ingenious ways.

"The primeval seacoast." writes Benton McKaye. President of the Wilderness Society. "was a double environment. a zone combining wild land and that other wilderness. the ocean." Yet only a century of the white man's use has left much of the California coast robbed of its primeval character. Most of the damage has been wrought within the past thirty years. It is a fact to consider carefully. with all of its tragic implications.

"No scenic and recreational resource in the United States is more sorely in need of preservation," stated Newton Drury, Chief of Division of Beaches and Parks in California. "There is only so much of it and there never will be more." California tends to neglect her responsibility to the nation, seeming to forget that her coast is the nation's coast. her beaches are not alone for the residents of her state. but for the people of Iowa and Kansas. the people of Wyoming and Arkansas. the people on the plains and in the mountains. and the children of the big cities.

Aside from the scientists' serious concern over the destruction of balanced ecology of plant and animal life along this western edge of the continent. it seems hardly necessary to remind ourselves that the beauty alone should be cherished as a heritage for future generations. Possessed alone by the eye that sees it. whether it be today or two generations hence. it must be left in its natural state. promised an undisturbed permanence.

Instead. it is gradually being seized and shut off from the public view—the rocky cliffs blasted for roads. the sands trucked away. a restaurant perched on a ledge. a subdivision staked out over salt marshes. a "keep out" sign along the beaches. all records of blind self-seeking. with no mind to the future.

In the town of Carmel. 120 miles south of San Francisco. it was the sudden threat of a new subdivision that aroused the people into awareness. From Carmel south for sixty-five miles. only one public beach

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*Elsewhere Margaret Owings says, "Ink drawing by myself/made to sell for cards to raise money. It is the north point at Whaler's Cove on Point Lobos and adjoins the San Jose Creek Beach/now called Monastery Beach."

was open for free public access. But in Carmel's dooryard, lying quietly in sun and fog, stretched a mile of beaches and rocks long taken for granted as a birthright by the children who played there, by the artists and writers stirred by its beauty, and by thousands of visitors who returned yearly because of it. Always a focus of much poetic expression, this particular coastline radiates an undeniable air of enchantment. Now this, too, is jeopardized.

The river mouth, in the words of Robinson Jeffers, "where the Carmel River leans upon its sand bar in love with the waves," is the heart of the area, and from it the beaches fan north to Stewart Point and south close to the border of that rare headland. Point Lobos Reserve, a state park jealously preserved in its natural condition by constant vigilance.

Behind the beaches, the Santa Lucia mountains quickly rise as background and drop their folds into the redwood canyons. One of these deep canyon streams flows into the sea over the San Jose Creek beach at the southern end of the mile stretch.

All along this curve, large rolling breakers pile onto the sands with a powerful roar because of the precipitous shelving off of the land into immediate deep waters. Always within sight and sound of the waves, sand verbena and beach asters, with their pale foliage and lavender rays, bridge the line between salty sands and rocky soil.

Tide rocks and worn boulders break the regularity of the beaches, and hold in their hollows and crevices the jewel-like sea gardens, those tiny balanced worlds of hermit crab and purple sea urchin. The blossom-shaped anemone, the pink abalone and the scarlet starfish cling to the rock walls, partially hidden by the sunset-colored seaweeds and presenting a dream world to the eye of the artist, to the curiosity of the child, or simply to you and me as we walk, free to explore and enjoy.

Sand dunes, dramatically cut through by the mouth of the Carmel River in the rainy season, separate the beach from the lagoon, where a fast vanishing type of habitat for land, shore and marsh birds holds the interest of ornithologists. The best known visitors are perhaps the pelicans, flying in single file, flapping their broad wings slowly, and gliding to a splashing stop onto the waters of the marsh. Here they feed during the day, returning at night to their roost on Point Lobos, one of their northernmost nesting spots on the Pacific Coast. Unless this feeding ground is preserved, it will undoubtedly be destroyed, and the ducks and loons, the grebes and rails, the rare white-tailed kite and the transient Emperor goose will all simply disappear.

You and I might watch with interest to what happened in Carmel when the town perceived that these beaches and the lagoon were actually endangered. "Carmel copes with threat of 'Improvement'," ran the editorials in the local news. San Francisco papers smiled sympathetically at the furor. "The sinister shadow of progress falls across Carmel's southern exposure." chuckled the reporters. "They want the land so they can leave it be."

Some said acquisition of the property would be a move toward socialism, a move against free enterprise; others, to the contrary, felt the owners should donate the land as a public duty. Some believed that the natural scientists would prevent the people from using the area for recreation, while others groaned over the recreational crowds that would litter the beaches.

But a small group of Carmel people turned their backs on the idle chatter and prepared for action. They organized as "The Point Lobos League" and met at the "Forge in the Forest" where the village smith stopped his hammering on the anvil, and mapped out a plan.

"The state is interested in those communities that show initiative in their own projects," he explained. "The county will

match all public subscriptions we can raise, and the state will match the total of private and county funds."

Within a few months' time the Point Lobos League had become a non-profit corporation with an aim "to preserve natural scenic and recreational areas for the use and enjoyment of the people." Pamphlets were printed and distributed, donation boxes appeared and school children's posters filled the shop windows.

"This is a drive by the little people," whispered one ex-college president to his retired banker friend in a back row at a meeting in the grammar school. "But," he added. "they are the people who get things done. Watch them."

The Carmel Art Association and Carmel Craft's Guild immediately expressed their enthusiasm as a body by heroically donating one hundred and twenty-two paintings. sculptures and handcrafts to a benefit that netted $3300. The Carmel Audubon Society. with its special interest in the bird life of the lagoon, donated $1000 from the proceeds of their yearly lecture series. A Christmas card was designed featuring a Point Lobos cove. and this sold out immediately. with all profits going to the drive.

An "Auction of Surplus Treasures" was dreamed up to include the housewife and the antique collector as both donor and purchaser.

"We are asking you (with a gentle curtsey)" ran the announcement. "to donate a surplus treasure. a choice object you can just (but barely) part with. All of these we shall entertainingly auction off on a gala day! And we promise dividends for your gifts, oh yes! A mile-long stretch of undisturbed beach permanently yours. A quiet lagoon filled with ducks, loons and herons, preserved as a bird sanctuary."

The result was an additional $3000.

By this time the campaign had spread far from town. and the Sierra Club. the Izaak Walton League and the Save-the-Redwoods League were but a few of the established organizations that offered their support.

A number of months passed and the "little people" placed $15,000 with the state's contingency fund. To this. the county contributed $25.000 and. with the state's matching money. brought the total to $80.000.

The beaches are by no means won. but an interval of watchful waiting bides in the "Forge in the Forest." Negotiations are now being carried on by the state with the owners. More money will be needed. but the "sinister shadow of progress" has momentarily been checked and in its place a different heart-warming form of progress has been awakened. A new respect, you and I might say, for time and tides.

To those of you who sense the earnest importance of this preservation we appeal for contributions. To those of you who have set foot on our light sands, make it possible for yourselves to return in the future with your children. Make it possible for your children's children to be free to enjoy it! Donations may be sent to the Point Lobos League. Box 2294. Carmel. California (deductible from taxable income).

Reprinted from the April-June 1952 issue of National Parks Magazine

Published by the National Parks Association, 1840 Mintwood Pl., N. W., Washington 9, D. C.

Margaret Owings Speech, 1965
Ninth Bienniel Wilderness Conference
Sponsored by the Sierra Club
San Francisco

I.

These two days -
we have been turning over in our hands -
A GREAT ROUGH ROCK - with many facets.
It is a TREASURED ROCK.
We call it " WILDERNESS"

Each facet is ONE VARIETY OF THIS WILDERNESS -
and the reflection from each facet -
is a HUMAN RESPONSE to that experience.

There are those of us -
who look at wilderness - primarily:
as a dimension
an immensity
a grand proportion.
The horizon LARGE against the outline of the dark mountain range.

These - may be people who work by EXPANSION -
and think by EXPANSION
Fanning out their interests -
It's the broad - deep picture - they find rewarding.

Then - there are those who turn primarily
TO THE INTIMATE SAVOR OF LANDSCAPE
the detail - the scent of nettle and mint
the lazy buzz of the mountain fly
the careless grace of a flower opening

2.

THESE people - are selective
They concentrate their attention
finding their REWARD - in INFINITE DETAIL.

But -
neither approach seeks confinement
both pursue the sense of the UNEXPLORED LANDSCAPE.
For -
each man - is his OWN EAGER EXPLORER.

It was RACHEL CARSON
who unrolled the long vistas before our eyes
and exacted man's place "as a mere moment of time"
"This particular moment of time - that is mine" -
she repeated again and again -
to help us see OUR PLACE and OUR ROLE and
the perils of OUR FUTURE - in the long view.

And - among us
it is the PERCEPTIVE EXPLORER
who can glimpse this VIEW
can uncover the links and bridges of history
AND FIND - his own PARTICULAR PLACE in the moment of
time.

3.

Having a LANDSCAPE to oneself -

is an exclusive pleasure.

Many of us - stumble upon this by surprise.

SUDDENLY - it is there

unshared

solitary.

One may well experience - A RECKLESS MOMENT of FREEDOM.

a penetrating moment of UNDERSTANDING.

A meaning - that was elusive -

is suddenly clear!

And - (in the words of Freya Stark)

one can carry long afterwards

" A SECRET SENSE OF EXILE"

Promise - is a word I associate with WILDERNESS.

PROMISE and INDEPENDENCE - are rare qualities

found deep in solitude.

Promise renews FAITH.

Independence is found ONLY when the sense of

belonging - is understood.

Sigurd Olson spoke of:

"the animal oneness with the earth"

(the sense of close relationship - of belonging)

4.

HOW can we RECAPTURE this relationship?

How can we return to this "oneness"?

What kind of a CEREMONY can lead us back?

The Mountain Chant of the Navajos

(in their dark circle of branches) ?

The Hopi Snake Dancers at Walpi - stamping on the

SAPUPAI - (the DOOR to the inner earth) ?

Sigurd Olson quoted:

PIERRE TEILARD de CHARDIN

(that rare soul who could make an experience flare with a presence!)

as saying ..... that - ONLY if man is receptive
said contemplative
aware

can HE OPEN THESE DOORS -

to what the universe and life really mean

can he open these doors - TO BELONGING.

But - for most of us

under the pressure and conflicts of human society

it is ONLY in the setting of WILDERNESS

that THIS REVELATION can unfold.

5.

I. - myself

experienced a FORM of REVELATION

one Autumn morning.

In an unexpected moment -

I witnessed a THIN SLICE of WILDERNESS

fleeting

and brief

but filled with a meaning

somehow - INTENSIFIED by the counterpart of its setting.

I was on the sidewalk of 55th Street

in the heart of NEW YORK CITY.

Around me was the noise and confusion -

the frantic strain of traffic

horns

whistles.

Tall buildings cast their shadows

over the deep chasm of the street.

It was the essence of the man-made world.

AT THAT MOMENT - as if by signal

every city sound about me was suddenly hushed.

ALL MECHANICAL UPROAR - was arrested abruptly -

(as if the power had been shut off)

6.

And - in the SILENCE of that instant
I heard - but ONE THING -
the delicate honking of geese - high overhead.
I looked up through the slot of buildings -
TO ANOTHER DEMENSION
as a V of geese moved south -
calling to one another
as they passed out of view.

ONE WORLD GAVE AWAY TO ANOTHER.

It was one of those:
"burning instances of truth"
(referred to by SIGURD OLSON)
"when everything stands clear"

Now - Loren Eiseley admonishes emissaries
returning from wilderness
TO RECORD their marvel
NOT - to define its meaning.

BUT - I am tempted to call your attention to:
several POTENT WORDS
used by SIGURD OLSON

"timelessness" - - "majestic rhythms"

7.

Each of you alone -

can read your own symbols

into the incident (I have tried to describe)

But it seems appropriate -

with the DEDICATION of the

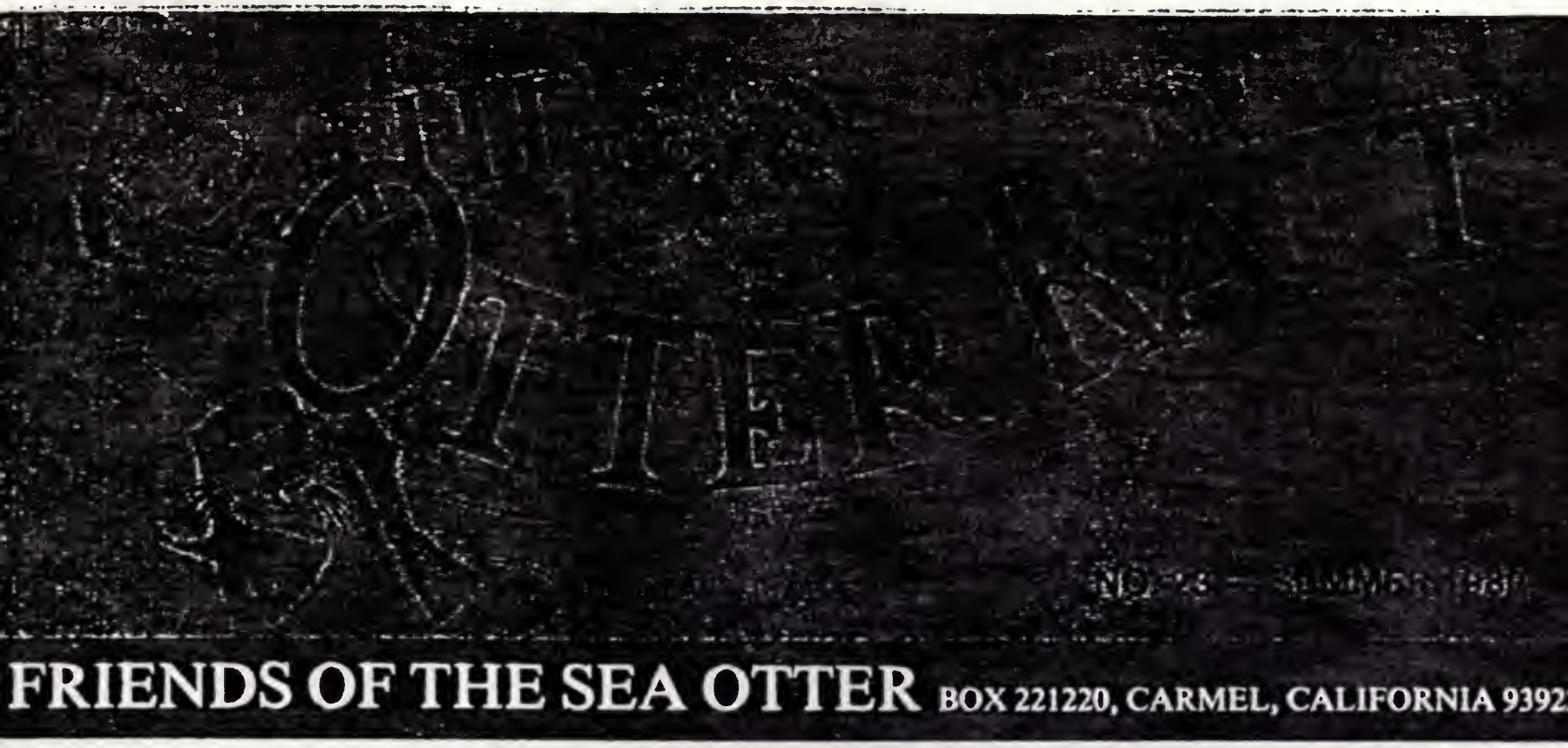
DAG HAMMARSKOLD MEMORIAL GROVE

tomorrow

to close - with these lines from his DIARY:

"A wind from my unknown goal
Stirs the strings -
In expectation .....

Shall I ever get there?
There - where life resounds -
A CLEAR PURE NOTE
In the silence."



FRIENDS OF THE SEA OTTER BOX 221220, CARMEL, CALIFORNIA 9392

1980 — THE YEAR OF THE COAST

Its restless shores and streaming shadows...

Margaret Owings

A banner year? Perhaps. A banner of whales blowing, a forest of kelp swinging in the tides and a raft of otters playing!

This dedication of the year 1980 — to awaken the nation to coastal problems and the desperate need for protection from over-development, eroded bluffs, dredged and filled wetlands, defaced shores and other ravages to the over-strained environment — is long overdue.

Our own directives for the year are focused on the waters, on the small dark form sliding down the waves, tossed and spun, inundated and swept into apparent oblivion. Yes, our effort is to keep marine waters clear and pure. Rachel Carson often mentioned the "unifying touch" of the sea with its elusive and indefinable boundaries. "A world," she said, "that keeps alive the sense of continuing creation — the relentless drive of life."

This vitality draws people to the sea, its sands, its promontories and its underwater world; soothing the troubled individual heart by the strength of its power, a breath of life in which the sea otter plays a key role. But Anne Simon's book, *The Thin Edge*, sobers our thoughts. "We can no longer escape the results of years of short-sighted use," she says, "but must, for the first time ever, witness the dying coast and wonder if we can still save it."

When President Carter ordered a review of all federal programs which significantly effect coastal resources — and heralded 1980 as "THE YEAR OF THE COAST," an overwhelming need was recognized. A Coastal Alliance was formed to emphasize that the fragile region by the sea can no longer be misused by those who think only of what it can yield to themselves.

"In reality," Cousteau muses, "there is on our planet a very small, finite, precious and vulnerable water reserve." Only along 200 miles of our Pacific coastline can we see the threatened southern sea otter ranging offshore. But this "smooth blue sea and a tumble of waves" must be examined with scientific accuracy. This coastal margin where sea lions fraternize and sea otters raft presents a precarious ecology with ever-increasing poisons: sewage and industrial wastes, chlorinated hydrocarbons, PCBs and mercury (to name but a few). In addition one looks with despair at the inevitability of oil-spills within the otters' range as tankers increase in size and numbers and off-shore oil-drilling becomes a certainty.

"The sea is your mirror," Baudelaire once deftly observed, but as the clear, pure water becomes toxic and stained we are finding only a reflection of ourselves — not a reflection of the life of the sea. Only in this awareness lies our salvation.

Photo by Steve Crouch

THE OTTER RAFT

NUMBER 26 WINTER, 1981

FRIENDS OF THE SEA OTTER BOX 221220, CARMEL, CALIFORNIA 93922

CLIFFSIDE SEAT

Margaret Owings

"Like winds and sunsets," wrote Aldo Leopold, "wild things are taken for granted . . . " Are we blind or indifferent to their values because they are wild and free? Or are we awakening for the first time to a realization that communities of wildlife, in the sea and on land, are an evolution of cooperation, groups living together in a complexity of roles in which man now plays a dominant part? The Indians referred to "the circle of life" with each member contributing to the whole, each preying upon another in a balanced and limited manner — the sea otter thrusting its paw and claw into a crevice for a shellfish while the white shark circles above. But man's over-exploitation of wild species, altering their natural habitats, is destroying the circle and the balance, gradually forcing the populations toward extinction.

A recently published book by Anne and Paul Ehrlich — "EXTINCTION, *The Causes and Consequences of the Disappearance of Species*" is leaving an impact. "People will have to understand what they will lose when a species is obliterated," these authors remind the reader again and again. Extinction of a species will endanger man himself.

Once again, in a broad current of sound, I am part of an afternoon hour, watching the vivid ocean below — its blue surface stretching like watered silk from coast to western horizon, supporting a mass of living things, from bacteria to algae, crabs and limpets, mammals and fish, all interlocked portions of living societies. Circles now appear on the surface of the sea as the high arched brows of two California sea lions emerge and move in unison and a sudden rising of whale backs interrupts the ocean sheen, probably the small minke whales that have been resting in this region. Farther out to sea in silhouette, a fin cuts the water like a knife, then disappears. An island of Sooty Shearwaters, perhaps a thousand resting together like a stain on the silk, elongates its shape as I watch. The big kelp bed below me rocks its blue heron, and a small raft of sleeping otters resolves the peace of this hour. A Monarch butterfly floats between me and the life below. How can I accept the word "extinction" when the harmony of "perpetuity" should apply?

To bring to a halt the accelerating rate of extinction, man himself must make the most valid change in attitude — an ethical change, a moral change followed by stricter laws and regulations. **The Marine Mammal Protection Act** was a strong step in this direction to reduce the alarming worldwide depletion of marine mammals. Introduced in 1972, it is now reauthorized for three more years — but with amendments which we shall watch with caution. **The Endangered Species Act of 1973** became a further protective measure — and the southern sea otter was designated "Threatened." This Act could well expire in 1982 unless the conservationists, the scientists and the people who care rise up in strength to reauthorize — with necessary safeguards still intact — the continuance of this protective discipline. For, "Freedom," wrote Freya Stark, "is a disciplined thing."

Photo by Steve Crouch

THE OTTER RAFT

NUMBER 29 SUMMER, 1983

FRIENDS OF THE SEA OTTER BOX 221220, CARMEL, CALIFORNIA 93922

The Winter Storm of '83

Margaret Owings

On that black morning, the sea along the Monterey coast exploded in shock and the towering surf, born on high tides, presented a somber orchestration through the depth of its tone. Making my way down our path along the cliff, I found myself leaning against a stinging wind . . .

Although winter along the California coast had commenced in a rough manner with powerful gales and heavy rains, with a long surge of swells causing havoc on the shoreline, it was not until the end of February that the immensity broke through. One might say that any prolonged storm was "a penetration into the unknown," but this one had a strangeness to its proportions. To the residents of Big Sur, it was a tumult, ravaging safeguards the people themselves had relied upon. Pouring down the steep slopes, it gouged the deep canyons and brought alive the placid mountains, moving them seaward in an organic manner — remolding the long-established folds of the Big Sur range. Yes, something fundamental was occurring as the mud and rocks demolished the Coast Highway for many miles — then, heavily dropped some 500 feet to the threshold of the sea.

Coastal residents who ventured out to experience the grandeur may have spotted what appeared to be a small dark log, sliding down a wave, tossed and spun, inundated and swept into apparent oblivion. After that momentary glimpse, the sea otter simply vanished.

And what of the pups? How can the mother otter continue to clutch her young or leave it to float as she dives for food? So slight in size during the first few weeks, this little puff of fur can be picked up by a wave and washed ashore or hurled against the rocks — its piercing cry lost in the din. Normally, the nursing areas are cloaked in kelp for security, but the massive canopies have been destroyed this winter, ripped from the rocky floor with the fronds shredded and pulverized. The destruction of the kelp beds had an immediate effect on the distribution of the otters — leaving them widely scattered, further offshore or clustered in what little kelp remained.

When asked about their survival, California Fish & Game biologist Jack Ames expressed the belief that easily 50% of the pups were lost this winter. He remembered a Monterey beach walk in early March when he found two dead young otters with woolly coats, their bodies lying among masses of dead birds.

But Ron Jameson, U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) biologist, gave us an upturn note when he reported from the Piedras Blancas marine field station that a female otter he had previously tagged had given birth to a pup in the churning waters near shore. Firmly holding her baby, she moved out into the storm, sculling through the barrier of waves breaking 30 to 40 feet high. Jameson doubted that the pair would survive — but the female's instinct clearly illustrated a technique for the survival of a species in a harsh environment. She sought to escape the turbulence by moving through it, paddling with her strong hind flippers to reach an unbroken expanse of great swells several miles from shore. Out there, she could feed the pup, and spend days and nights licking and grooming it. It was not until three weeks later that Jameson saw her again, when, from the shore embankment, he looked down through the rain at the upturned face of this valiant little mother, her pup asleep on her chest. Hunger and home territory must have brought her back.

Sea lions were also driven by instinctive measures for survival. USFWS biologist Glenn VanBlaricom watched "Outer Islet," the 110-foot-high landmark rock where waters were plunging over its crest while sea lions were climbing and clinging two-thirds of the way up its steep shielded side. At the same time, rancher Tom Tolman at Pecho Ranch reported 6 or 7 sea lions seeking refuge in a fresh water pond on his inland property. But other marine mammals, such as elephant seal pups, suffered high mortality, unable to cope with the strength of the waves and the undertow. Pelagic birds, so closely associated with the surface of the sea, were unable to dive for food, and left a tragic record of starved bodies along the sands. Brandt's cormorants could not nest on the bird rocks this year. Winds were too strong for brooding and seas too high for diving.

But a morning finally came, bright and quiet. The coast range steadied itself and the forces of the sea once again offered a gentle, unifying touch to the shore.

90 inches of rain had fallen.

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CLIFFSIDE SEAT

Margaret Owings

A DELICATE— UNEVEN— STACCATO PULSE OF ENDANGERED LIFE

Lao-Tzu, the old Chinese sage, once observed a simple note of wisdom. "The utility of the cart," he wrote, "depends upon the hollow center in which the axle turns." Yes, indeed, the turn of the wheel is the journey, strengthened by the hub through which the axle passes, with spokes reaching to the periphery of the rim. But what is the hollow center?

Figuratively speaking, the hollow center must be the stable sense of place, filled with vitality while the world moves around it. Perhaps it is the heart of the habitat, implying life and space and wonder, as when the heavy brine slips out from under the cloak of kelp to break on the rocks with a white explosion — and a door is flung open to perceive the unexpected sea otter!

In the great rhythms of our planet, this hollow center might appear to be a small segment — but instead, it's an immensity in which peace and harmony and life exist. For the utility of the cart is empty without these intuitive values.

Friends of the Sea Otter has long been a voice in the wilderness, crying out in alarm that the California sea otter is barely holding its own. But our cries were often disregarded by government agencies, and the population estimates often shifted to suit the political situation.

But now, three separate census counts of the southern sea otter population have recently been carefully taken by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the California Department of Fish & Game. These

Photo by William Bryan

counts were made from land, supplemented by air observations in areas where land-viewing was not sufficient. In 1982, the spring count was 1,124 adults accompanied by 222 pups. In the fall of that year, 1,194 adults were counted and 144 pups were seen. Following the long winter storms of 1983, a late spring count presented us with 1,153 adults and only 122 pups.

Need I say that the future survival of the California sea otter depends on this small adult number, barely fluctuating, and an inadequate number of pups to rebuild this sinking population.

Yes, these counts clearly indicate what we ourselves have repeatedly expressed. They confirm the need for an **endangered classification** for the California sea otter; or, ecologically speaking, the hollow center in which the axle turns will lose its balance, and the cart of life its vitality.

APPENDIX E

37th North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference
Technical Session - Preservation:Peril or Panacea?

Mexico City

A COMMITMENT IN DEFENSE OF NATURAL SYSTEMS

by

Margaret Owings
Big Sur, California - 93920

I speak as a layman, one person out of the vast growing assemblage of conservation-minded citizens. I am one of those citizens who place high value on wildlife in its natural state in a propitious environment, and do not care to kill it.

I am oriented toward the preservation of wildlife rather than toward its exploitation for commercial gain, sport-killing for recreation and the ingrown theory that wildlife is useless unless used. I am concerned about the gratification of our greed.

I am, perhaps, the proverbial "little old lady in tennis shpes", although the cliché is often inappropriately employed. Also, I am a woman who ensnares rattlesnakes alive and moves them from the point of land on which we live to an isolated region several miles away. I kill them only when their location is markedly hazardous to ourselves and they cannot be extracted without risk. One might say that this is a form of "management".

I carry a distrust for management programs which frequently impress me as systems to subjugate and subdue. Some might consider them practical solutions, mathematical equations that balance life against life, a controlled world without blemish. I favor the necessary studies to carry out research on shifting situations in wildlife populations and habitat, if the study itself does not damage the studied. I am aware that the biological imbalance

already brought about by man, can sometimes be rectified by some management - including the management of man himself. Invariably, out of wildlife studies come management proposals for manipulation from the complex to the simple. Is this a step backward?

My introduction to wildlife management took place along the border of the Los Padres National Forest, California, in high ridge country laced only by a fire-road. It was in the early fifties when I was hiking with my dog along an animal trail. A government vehicle appeared and braked to a stop to warn me that I had better pick up my dog since traps and cyanide guns had just been set out. Quite naturally, I asked the man what they were after. The answer was "predators" because they had just introduced a dozen wild turkeys into the area and wanted to clear the region of their natural enemies.

I didn't need an education in science to recognize that protection of exotic game targets for the sportsmen through extermination of predators upon which the natural systems depended was wrong. From that moment on, I took a new look. I paid attention to government agencies and their bureaus and the pressures that directed their activities.

Administrators of the natural resources, I found, usually claim that their decisions are in the public interest. This public interest, however, is subject to opinions based on self-interest and reflects dominant groups. A major criterion for determining public interest is often not related to quality perspective or long-view consequences but instead, is based on numbers of people, sums of money and associated commercial enterprises.

In the administration, the resource managers themselves, I found, tended to operate away from the field, caught up in administrative work with prime concern focused on management of people in their regulation and use of a resource. Biologists present their specialized studies but it is the administration which interprets it. Wardens in the field are given no preogatives to make management policy decisions, though they are closely connected with the wildlife picture. Those at the top of the pyramid, appear to wear blinders when it comes to diversity.

Who are the dominant groups that direct the administration of wildlife in California? Since few in the Department of Fish & Game are charged with maintaining wildlife for the enjoyment of California who do not care to kill, the dominant groups to receive attention are the Associated Sportsmen and the California Wildlife Federation, the hunting public. Though the public itself owns the game, the Depar ment of Fish & Game, supported mainly by funds which accrue from hunting and fishing licenses, duck stamps, wetlands stamps and the Pittman-Robertson tax, serves primarily to enhance this game for some 763,284 hunters and 2,323, 847 fishermen whose fees pay the bills. (figures for 1970)

Thus, three-million out of some twenty-million citizens in the state, direct the wildlife picture, sending their lobbys into the legislature sessions and penetrating in depth the administration of the Department.

A counter-balance to this California self-service pressure group has sprung out of a change of pubic attitude and a sudden astonished awareness that the law reads: "Wildlife is the property of the people - the sovereignty of which they have vested in the

state to conserve and manage for the benefit of all the people." What has brought about this change in public attitude? The recognition of a deteriorating environment and the growing comprehension of the word "ecology"? Or, the impact of the long view - our planet in space, "small and blue and beautiful in the eternal silence in which it floats"? Or, is it the news media's dramatic emphasis on endangered species with quality photography illustrating animals in action in the systems in which they live?

The concept is taking hold that wildlife is there, that it is part of us, that we are part of it, that all life is an extension of ourselves. And out of it, a new form of recreation is evolving that takes nothing away; observing wildlife with binoculars and recording it with lense, describing it in writing and participating as individuals in the act of appreciation and the effort of preservation.

In California, these people have grown increasingly uneasy and impatient with the administration of the State Fish & Game and its handling of certain of the state's distinguished mammals. These people are organizing and have taken their concerns to their legislators and have found a responsive body at the Capitol to introduce restrictive legislation for the protection of wildlife. In addition, these people have defeated special-interest bills favorable to Department programs.

In the spring of 1970, the foremost issue in this line was a matter of values - balanced one against the other.

Where do you place your value? the public was asked. On a small gourmet industry, the red abalone, or on a rare marine mammal, the southern sea otter?

California Senate Bill 442, pressured by the abalone industry and approved by the Department of Fish & Game, was introduced to "solve" the sea otter and commercial abalone controversy. Although the population count of the "fully protected" southern sea otter, Enhydra lutris nereis, was 1014, this Bill provided that sea otters could be "taken outside the California Sea Otter Refuge", providing there had been a public hearing before the Fish & Game Commission.

The public was quick to discover that the word "take" could imply "kill" and that 1/3 of the total southern sea otter population was outside the Refuge as the Bill was introduced. Although the 100 mile Refuge, established by Legislative act soon after the otters were rediscovered in 1938, was to protect otters not to limit their movements, the reading of the Bill suggested otherwise.

Placed in the catagory as competitors for the red abalone, the otter was blamed for the decline of an industry which was suffering, in great part, from its own overharvest. In addition, the abalone resource was declining along the entire coast of California, much of which was far from the otter's range. Although the otter is skilled in extracting abalones from underwater rocks, he does so with time, effort and many dives. He also eats some 26 other items of food which he procures more easily.

As the facts unfolded, the Bill became an educational process for the public. Their admiration for the otter's charm and tool-using capacities commenced to reach deeper into understanding his complex role in the marine ecology. Since otters are the chief harvesters of the sea urchin, Strongylocentrotus purpurtus, the absence of otters in southern California waters had permitted the urchins to multiply unhindered. Since the sea urchins destroy kelp,

they affect the vast community of marine life dependent upon it, including the abalone. Thus, the public learned about the subtle life-relationships that link marine organisms to one another and to their surroundings.

Amended at the last minute to remove the word "take" and substitute "catch, capture or pursue", the bill was backed by the Sportsmen's lobby and the California Wildlife Federation. "Speaking for more than 800,000 people whom we represent in California", they said, "this is a very good piece of legislation."

But the informed and serious conservation groups placed their values with the otters, bombarded their legislators and defeated the bill. Robert T. Orr, Associate Director, California Academy of Sciences, summed up the issue in essence, when he testified at the Hearing: "We are living in an age when our nation is becoming very conservation-minded - trying to undo the great damage that man has done to his environment. Senate Bill 442 is so far out of tune with this concept that it might well have been conceived in the 19th century. It proposes to curb sea otters which are barely past the danger point. And why? So that a small group of market hunters - commercializing on something that belongs to all of us, can continue their exploitation to produce a gourmet item."

To many of us, it appeared that the Department continued a devaluation of the southern sea otter when it recommended to its Commission the removal of this mammal from its former "rare" catagory on the State's "Rare and Endangered List". With it's population dangerously low, this sub-species of the more populous northern sea otter, Enhydra lutris, is subject to residues of mercury,cadmium,

copper and zinc in the marine life on which it feeds as well as pollution from pesticides, toxic wastes and raw sewage. Continual harassment by commercial abalone divers (approximately 50 deaths attributed in 2 years) as well as propeller lacerations from increased boat marina activity (27 deaths attributed) added to the unceasing threat of oil spills from tanker traffic would indicate small assurance of safety for this remarkable marine mammal. Was the Department's recommendation influenced not by these facts but by the fact that their own hands could be tied in carrying out a management program if the otters continued on the Rare and Endangered list?

Government stewardship to guard a diversity of wildlife for the benefit of all the people has foundered too often and too long. Without a game label, wildlife is tossed into the "varmit"catagory, easy target for the man with the gun. Fish & Game admit that they know nothing of the non-game distribution. "We have some 129 wildlife forms in short supply whose status is undetermined"(1.),they report.

(1.) Howard R.Leach,California's Endangered Wildlife,1971, Joint Conference California-Nevada Section of Wildlife Society.

Yet these animals such as the bobcat, racoon,possum,skunk, coyote,etc. increase the efficiency of life as a part of the ecosystem. If they are not killed as predators or are not eaten by predators, man moves in with further carnage. A recent aerial broadcasting of grains soaked in 1080 poison in San Luis Obispo and Fresno counties in California, brought this justification from the Agricultural Commissioner""it is no longer feasible",he wrote, "to control ground squirrels with coyotes and rattlesnakes."

I have made reference to hunting which is approved by law as a recognized form of recreation. Men purchase arms from the munitions industry and equipment from the sporting goods market, they buy licenses and stamps from the government and go out in trucks at prescribed dates according to regulations and shoot game they do not need for food. There are exceptions, of course, when farm game may serve an indispensible food requirement but these are rare. Although hunting may diminish wildlife, it augments the economy which is a factor in its political power. According to Ed Zern, outdoor writer for Field & Stream, it answers a "psychic need".(2)

(2.) Ed Zern,"I am a Hunter", Audubon Magazine, Jan.1972

What is this psychic need? Is it to perform man's dominion over life? To fell a tree? To dam a wild river? To cut down a strong free animal in action? I say it is an uneven contest, this use of steel and fire and neither tradition nor its legality make it benign.

Mr. Zern claims that non-hunters refuse to accept death as an essential part of life. Yet, only when man himself is prey, can he refuse or accept death. In North America what predator stalks the hunter's trail? In Africa, man can experience the role of being prey to others when he walks through the bush and forest along the Mara River in Kenya - taking a chance, observing, sensing the uneven, varied, staccato pulse of wildlife. Without a rifle one is totally part of this process of life. Using caution, one is exhilera and stimulated through an intuitive sense braced for consequences. But it is without a safeguard guarantee. Give one the guarantee and vitality stagnates. A keener experience I have never known.

But I am not here to moralize about hunting. Many sportsmen carry their own code of ethics and carefully follow the law as it is defined. There are others, however, with gun-racks in their pick-ups who only need a moving target. Within sight of our house, the Great Blue Heron lay on its side on the shore; the ~~fawn~~ giving birth to a ~~doe~~ stumbled and fell under our Redwoods; the white Stellar sea lion, a beach master lording it over his harem, was struck by an explosion at the peak of his power. We watched it happen. The trucks move on. They are what Ian McHarg would call "vandals of our storehouse".

Howard Leach, California Wildlife Management Supervisor, said," We realize how unknowledgeable we are concerning the status of California's non-game animals, particularily those in short supply." (3.)

(3.) Ibid

Yet, when the California mountain lion was moved from the non-game catagory into Big Game status, the Department, without preliminary studies, commenced sale of an unrestricted number of one dollar permits to hunt lions any season, day or night, either sex, young or old, use of dogs and no game limit to the hunter. A sanctimonious measure was added against traps and poison.

At this time, when the world is closing in on wildlife from all sides, the Department, without any study to substantiate it, made a flat statement. "The lion's population", they said, "is stable."

"To base management policy on guesswork", wrote George Schaller to the Senate Natural Resources Committee,May 21,1971,

"is a sad state of affairs in a state with as large a Game Department staff as in California."

With the cougar's wild habitat increasingly accessible to skilled hunters and trained dogs, discrete lion populations could be eliminated. Before the year was over, the State had sold 4746 lion permits to prospective hunters. "As long as we keep on killing them, there must be lions left", was the only possible theory under which this Game program could be operating. (4.)

(4.) Bill Gilbert

In the early months of this 1971 program, Assembly Bill 660 was introduced to stop the sport-killing of lions and provide for the take and capture of lions causing depredation. The public, perceiving an acceleration of the decline of this beautiful animal, was challenged into vigorous activity. Over 50 conservation organizations banned together with a "Preservation platform" that covered the State with its message. In alarm, chairman of the State Fish & Game Commission called it "tunnel vision". As the conservationists carried the Bill through the Assembly, the California Wildlife Federation wrote their members, "once again the anti-hunting people are threatening our sport."

13,003 lions had been killed in the State between 1907 and 1971. The peak decade of this kill was from 1927 - 1936 with 2,708 lions taken, whereas, the last recorded decade ending in 1963, showed 1292 lions taken, a 53% drop in kill. These were the bounty years and the reported bounty-take declined from the peak in each of the following decades.

The California Fish & Wildlife Plan in 1964, stated that "there are probably no more than 100 individuals who make an effort

to hunt lions", yet, suddenly in 1971, 4746 hunters were out seeking a big game trophy. 84 lions were taken.

Dr. A. Starker Leopold testified before the Senate Committee expressing a hope that the time would come when the final satisfaction of a lion hunt would end with treeing a lion with dogs, not shooting it. However, he indicated that the lion would be better off under Fish & Game with supervised hunting than with no jurisdiction under legislative action. Pointing out that virtually nothing is done in California to help an animal flourish, unless it comes within the jurisdiction of the Department, he pressed for a much needed study and agreed that a 4 year moratorium on hunting during the study years would make it a liveable bill. We amended the bill to follow these proposals.

In the meantime, the Fish & Game Commission passed new cautious regulations for the coming season on lions, permitting only 50 lions to be shot during a limited season with certain areas closed to hunting.

But the conservation-minded citizens had been challenged. They were not assured - and in a massive manner, they pressed the amended bill through the legislature and, reaching the Governor's desk, they procured his signature and made it into law.

As Dr. Leopold remarked, "if the Department cannot accept the change of public attitude toward wildlife and respond to these pressures, everything will consequently go the legislative route."

A Department paper by Mr. Leach echoed this opinion when it concluded with this warning. "We better get wired into the environm

issue of the day or someone else will take our place."

Yes, someone else will take your place - and will bring to a halt the lop-sided program dealing primarily with game animals - failing outright to strengthen or protect wildlife as a whole.

The American Game Policy, 1928-30 can no longer stand alone any more than a living body split down the center, can operate without the other half. With the biota losing its structure and wildlife populations shrinking, the National and State agencies must be reminded for the final time that the public, not the sportsmen, own the game and non-game animals.

This public voice, as yet an unharnessed strength, will prevail and newly established wildlife agencies oriented in training for a guardianship role, will take your place, financed by funds from general taxation as well as a share of the sportsmen's fees and a Preservation License purchased by citizens across the nation.

Out of the 37th North American Wildlife Conference, this single imperative change must evolve. It means an about-face.

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